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ALICE LORRAINE.

A TALE OF THE SOUTH DOWNS.

BY

RICHARD DODDRIDGE BLACKMORE,

AUTHOR OF "THE MAID OF SKER," "LORNA DOONE," ETC.

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ὕυτως ἔχει σοι ταῦτα, καὶ δείξεις τάχα,
εἴτ' εὐγενὴς πέφυκας, εἴτ' ἐσθλῶν κακή.

SOPH. *Ai*

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ALICE LORRAINE.

CHAPTER I.

STERLING AND STRIKING AFFECTION.

At this particular time there was nothing so thoroughly appreciated, loved, admired, and begged, borrowed, or stolen in every corner of the Continent, as the good old English guinea. His fine old face and his jovial colour made him welcome everywhere; one look at him was enough to show his purity, substance, and sterling virtue, and prove him sure to outlast in the end the flashy and upstart "Napoleon." Happily for the world, that poor, weak-coloured, and adulterated coin now called the "sovereign," was not the representative of English worth at that time; otherwise Europe might have been either France or Russia for a century.

And though we are now in the mire so low —through time-servers, hucksters, and demagogues—that the voice of England is become no more than the squeak of a halfpenny shoeblack, we might be glad to think of all our fathers did, at our expense, so grandly and heroically, if nations (trampled on for years, and but for England swept away) would only take it as not a mortal injury that through us they live. At any rate, many noble Spaniards in and round about Malaga condescended to come and see the unloading of the British corvette, *Cleopatra-cum-Antonio.* She was the nimblest little craft (either on or off a wind) of all ever captured from the French; and her name had been reefed into *Clipater* first, and then into *Clipper*, which still holds way. And thus, in spite of all her money, she had run the gauntlet of Americans and Frenchmen, and lay on her keel discharging.

Lorraine regarded this process with his usual keen interest.

The scene was so new, and the people so strange, and their views of the world so original, that he could not have tried to step into anything nobler and more refreshing. There was no such babel of gesticulation as in

a French harbour must have been; but there was plenty of little side-play, in and out among the natives, such as a visitor loves to watch. And the dignity with which the Spaniards took the money into their charge was truly gratifying to the British mind. "They might have said 'Thank you,' at any rate," thought Hilary, signing the bill of delivery, under three or four Spanish signatures. But that was no concern of his.

One hundred thousand British guineas, even when they are given away, are not to be made light of. Their weight (without heeding the iron chests, wherein they were packed in Threadneedle Street) perhaps was not very much under a ton; and with the chests must have been nearly two tons. There were ten chests, thoroughly secured and sealed, each containing ten thousand guineas, and weighing about 4 cwt. All these were delivered by the English agent to the deputy of Count Zamora, who was accompanied by two members of the Junta of Seville, and the Alcalde of Cordova; and these great people, after no small parley, and with the aid of Spanish officers, packed all the consignment into four mule-carts, and sent them under strong escort to headquarters near

Cordova. Here the Count met them, and gave a receipt to Hilary for the Spanish subsidy, which very soon went the way of all money among the Spanish soldiers. And the next day the five less lucky mules, who were dragging the pay of the British army, went on with the five remaining chests—three in one cart and two in the other—still under Spanish escort, towards the slopes of the Sierra Morena.

Hilary, as usual, adapted himself to the tone and the humour around him. The Spanish officers took to him kindly, and so did the soldiers, and even the mules. He was in great spirits once more, and kindly and cordially satisfied with himself. His conscience had pricked him for many months concerning that affair with Claudia; but now it praised him for behaving well, and returning to due allegiance. He still had some little misgiving about his vows to the Spanish maiden; but really he did not believe that she would desire to enforce them. He was almost sure in his heart that the lovely young Donna did not care for him, but had only been carried away for the moment, by her own warmth, and his stupid fervour. Tush! he now found himself a little too wide awake, and experienced in the ways of women,

to be led astray by any of them. Claudia was a most beautiful girl, most fascinating, and seductive; but now, if he only kept out of her way, as he meant most religiously to do——

"The brave and renowned young captain," said the Count of Zamora, riding up in the fork of the valley where the mountain-road divided, and one branch led to his house, "will not, of course, disdain our humble hospitality for the night?"

"I fear that it cannot be, dear senhor, answered Lorraine, with a lift of his hat in the Spanish manner, which he had caught to perfection; "my orders are to make all speed with the treasure, until I meet our detachment."

"We are responsible for the treasure," the Count replied, with a smile of good-humour, and the slightest touch of haughtiness, "until you have crossed the river upon the other side of our mountains. Senhor, is not that enough? We have travelled far, and the mules are weary. Even if the young captain prefers to bivouac in the open air, it is a proverb that the noble English think more of their beasts than of themselves. And behold, even now the sun is low; and there are clouds impending! The escort is under my orders as yet. If you

refuse, I must exercise the authority of the Junta."

What could Hilary do but yield? He was ordered to be at the Count's disposal; and thus the Count disposed of him. Nevertheless he stipulated that the convoy should pursue its course, as soon as the moon had risen; for the night is better than the day for travelling, in this prime of the southern year.

So the carts were brought into a walled quadrangle of the Monte Argento; and heavy gates were barred upon them, while the mules came out of harness, and stood happily round a heap of rye. The Spanish officers, still in charge, were ready to be most convivial; and Hilary fell into their mood, with native compliance well cultivated. In a word, they all enjoyed themselves.

One alone, the star of all, the radiant, brilliant, lustrous one, the admired of all admirers, that young Claudia, was sorrowful. Hilary, in the gush of youthful spirits and promotion; in the glow of duty done and lofty standard satisfied; through all the pride of money paid by the nation he belonged to; and even the glory of saying good things in a language slightly known to him;—Hilary

caught from time to time those grand reproachful eyes, and felt that they quite spoiled his dinner. And he was not even to get off like this.

For when he was going in the calmest manner, to order forth his carts, and march, with the full moon risen among the hills—the daintiest little note ever seen came into his hand, as softly as if it were dropped by a dove too young to coo. He knew that it came from a lady of course; and in the romantic place and time, his quick heart beat more quickly.

The writing was too fine for even his keen eyes by moonlight; but he managed to get to a quiet lamp, and there he read as follows: "You have forgotten your vows to me. I must have an explanation. There is no chance of it in this house. My nurse has a daughter at the 'bridge of echoes.' You know it, and you will have to cross it, within a league of your journey. If I can escape, I shall be on that bridge in two hours' time. You will wait for me there, if you are an English gentleman."

This letter was unsigned, but of course it could only come from Claudia. Of all those conceited young Spanish officers, who had been contradicting Lorraine, and even daring to

argue with him, was there one who would not have given his right hand, his gilt spurs, or even his beard, to receive such a letter and such an appointment from the daughter of the Count of Zamora?

Hilary fancied, as he said farewell, in the cumbrous mass of shadows and the foliage of the moonlight, that Donna Camilla (who came forth, with a white mantilla fluttering) made signs, as if she longed, with all her heart, to speak to him. But the Count stood by, and the guests of the evening, and two or three mule-drivers cracking whips; and Hilary's horse turned on his tail, till the company kissed their hands to him. And thus he began to descend through trees, and rocks, and freaks of shadow-land, enjoying the freshness of summer night, and the tranquil beauty of moonlit hills. Nickles and Bones, the two English troopers, rode a little in advance of him, each of them leading a spare horse, and keeping his eyes fixed stubbornly on the treasure-carts still in the custody of the Spanish horsemen. For the Englishmen had but little faith in the honesty of "them palavering Dons," and regarded it as an affront, and a folly, that the treasure should be in their charge at all.

In this order they came to the river Zujar, quite a small stream here, at the foot of the mouhtains, and forming the boundary of the Count's estates. According to the compact with the Spaniards, and advices that day received, the convoy was here to be met by a squadron of horse from Hill's division; who at once would assume the charge of it, and be guided, as to their line of return, by Captain Lorraine's suggestions. At the ford, however, there was no sign of any British detachment, and the trumpeters sounded a flourish in vain.

Hilary felt rather puzzled by this; but his own duty could not be in doubt. He must on no account allow the treasure-carts to pass the ford, and so quit Spanish custody, until placed distinctly under British protection. And this he said clearly to the Spanish colonel, who quite agreed with him on that point, and promised to halt until he got word from Lorraine to move into the water. Then Bones and Nickles were despatched to meet and hurry the expected squadron; for the Spanish troopers were growing impatient, and their discipline was but fortuitous.

Under these circumstances young Lorraine was sure that he might, without any neglect,

spare just a few minutes, to do his duty elsewhere, as a gentleman. He felt that he might have appeared perhaps to play fast and loose with Claudia, although in his heart he was pretty certain that she was doing that same with him. And now he intended to tell her the truth, and beg to be quit of a vow, whose recall was more likely to gall than to grieve her.

The "bridge of echoes" was about a furlong above the ford, where the convoy halted It was an exceedingly ancient bridge, supposed to be even of Gothic date, and patched with Moorish workmanship. It stood like a packsaddle over the torrent, which roared from the mountains under it; and it must have been of importance once, as commanding approach to the passes. For, besides two deep embrasures wherein defenders might take shelter, it had (at the south or Morena end) a heavy fortalice beetling over, with a dangerous portcullis. And the whole of it now was in bad repair, so that every flood or tempest worked it away, at the top or bottom; and capable as it was of light carts or of heavy people, the officers were quite right in choosing to send the treasure by the ford below.

Hilary proved that his sword was free to leap at a touch from its scabbard, ere ever he set foot on that time-worn, shadowy, venerable, and cut-throat bridge. The precaution perhaps was a wise one. But it certainly did not at first sight exhibit any proof of true love's confidence in the maiden he was come to meet. It showed the difference between a wise love and a wild one; and Hilary smiled as he asked himself whether he need have touched his sword, in coming to meet Mabel. Then, half ashamed of himself, for such very low mistrust of Claudia, he boldly walked through the crumbling gateway, and up the steep rise of the bridge.

On the peaked crown of the old arch he stood, and looked both up and down the river. Towards the mountains there was nothing but loneliness and rugged shadow; scarred with clefts of moonlight, and at further distance fringed with mist. And down the water, and the quiet sloping of the lowlands, everything was feeding on the comfort of the summer night; the broad delicious calm of lying under nature's womanhood; when the rage of the masculine sun is gone, and fair hesitation comes after it.

Hilary looked at all these things; but did not truly see them. He took a general idea that the view was beautiful; and he might have been glad, at another time, to stand and think about it. For the present, however, his time was short, and he must make the most of it. The British detachment might appear at the ford, at any moment; and his duty would be to haste thither at once, and see to the transfer of convoy. And to make sure of this, he had begged that the Spanish trumpets might be sounded; while he kept his own horse waiting for him, and grazing kindly where the grass was cold.

The shadow of the old keep, and the ivy-mantled buttress, fell along the roadway of the bridge, and lay in scollops there. Beyond it, every stone was clear (of facing or of parapet), and the age of each could be guessed almost, and its story, and its character. Even a beetle, or an earwig, must have had his doings traced, if an enemy were after him. But under the eaves of the lamp of night, and within all the marge of the glittering, there lay such darkness as never lies in the world, where the moon is less brilliant. Hilary stood in the broad light waiting; and out of the shadow came Claudia.

"I doubted whether you would even do me the honour to meet me here," she said; "oh, Hilary, how you are changed to me!"

"I have changed in no way, senhorita; except that I know when I am loved."

"And you do not know—then you do not know—it does not become me to say it, perhaps. Your ways are so different from ours, that you would despise me if I told it all. I will not weep. No, I will not weep."

With violent self-control, she raised her magnificent eyes to prove her words; but the effort was too much for her. The great tears came, and glistened in the brilliance of the moonlight; but she would not show them, only turned away; and wished that nobody in the world should know the power of her emotions.

"Come, come!" said Hilary (for an Englishman always says "come, come," when he is taken aback), "you cannot mean half of this, of course. Come, Claudia; what can have made you take such a turn? You never used to do it!"

"Ah, I may have been fickle in the days gone by. But absence—absence is the power that proves——"

"Hark! I hear a sound down the river! Horses' feet, and wheels, and clashing——"

"No; it is only the dashing of the water. I know it well. That is why this bridge is called the 'bridge of echoes.' The water makes all sorts of sounds. Look here; and I will show you."

She took his hand, as she spoke, and led him away from the parapet facing the ford to the one on the upper side of the bridge; when, suddenly, such a faintness seized her, that she was obliged to cling to him, as she hung over the low and crumbling wall. And how lovely she looked in the moonlight, so pale, and pure, and perfect; and at the same time so intensely feminine and helpless!

"Let me fall," she murmured; "what does it matter, with no one in the world to care for me? Hilary, let me fall, I implore you."

"That would be nice gratitude to the one who nursed me, and saved my life. Senhorita, sit down, I pray you. Allow me to hold you. You are in great danger."

'"Oh no, oh no!" she answered faintly; as he was obliged to support her exquisite, but, alas! too sensitive figure. "Oh, I must not be embraced. Oh, Hilary, how can you do such a thing to me?"

"How can I help such a thing, you mean? How beautiful you are, Claudia!"

"What is the use of it? Alas! what is the use of it, if I am? When the only one in all the world——"

"Ah! There I heard that noise again. It is impossible that it can be the water,—and I see horses, and the flash of arms."

"Oh, do not leave me! I shall fall into the torrent. For the sake of all the saints, stay one moment! How can I be found here? What infamy!—at least, at least, swear one thing."

"Anything—anything. But I must be gone. I may be ruined in a moment."

"And so may I. In the name of the Saviour, swear not to tell that I met you here. My father would kill me. You cannot even dream——"

"I swear that no power on earth shall make me say a word about you."

"Oh, I faint, I faint! Lay me there in the shadow. No one will see me. It is the last time. Oh, how cruel, how cold, how false! how bitterly cruel you are to me!"

"Is it true," in a breath he whispered—for now he was in great stir and hurry, and

heard the Spanish trumpets sound, as he carried her towards the shadow of the keep, and there for an instant leaned over her; "is it true that you love me, Claudia?"

"With my whole,—oh, what do I say?" And as if she could not trust the echoes, she glanced at the corner timidly; "oh, do not go, for one moment, darling!—with every atom of my poor——"

"Heart," she was going to say, no doubt, but was spared the trouble; for down fell Hilary, stunned by a crashing blow from that dark corner; and in a moment Alcides d'Alcar had him by the throat with gigantic hands, and planted one great knee on his breast.

"Did I do it well?" asked Claudia, recovering bright activity. "Oh, don't let him see me. He never must know it."

"Neither that nor anything else shall he know," the brigand muttered, with a furious grasp; until poor Hilary's blue eyes started forth their sockets. "You did it too well, my fair actress; so warmly, indeed, that I am quite jealous. The bottom of the Zujar is his marriage-couch."

"Loosen his throat, or I scream for his comrades. You promised me not to hurt him.

He shall not be hurt more than we can help; although he has been so faithless to me."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the great brigadier; "there is no understanding the delicate views of the females. But you shall be obeyed, beloved one. He will come to himself in about ten minutes; these Englishmen have such a thickness of head. Search him; be quick; let me have his despatch-book. You know where your lovers keep their things."

Senseless though Hilary lay, the fair maiden kept herself out of the range of his eyes, as her nimble fingers probed him. In a moment she drew from an inner breast-pocket his private despatch-book, and Mabel's letter, and portrait. Those last she stowed away for her own revenge, after glancing with great contempt at them; but the book she spread open to her lover.

"It is noble!" he cried, as the brilliant moonlight shone upon the pages. "What could be more fortunate? Here are the blank forms with the heading, and the flourish prepared for his signature. There is his metal pencil. Now write as I tell you in Spanish, but with one or two little barbarisms; such as you know him given to. 'The detachment is here. I am

holding them back. They are not to cross the water. Send the two carts through; but do not come yourselves. Good-night, and many thanks to you. May we soon meet again. (Signed) Hilary Lorraine.' You know how very polite he is."

"It is written, and in his own hand, most clearly. He has been my pupil, and I have been his. Poor youth, I am very sorry for him. Now let me go. Have I contented you?"

"I will tell you at the chapel to-morrow night. I shall have the cleverest and most beautiful bride in all Iberia. How can I part with you till then?"

"You will promise me not to hurt him," she whispered through his beard, as he clasped her warmly; while Hilary lay at their feet, still senseless.

"By all the saints that ever were, or will be, multiplied into all the angels! One kiss more, and then adieu, if it must be."

The active young Claudia glided away; while the great brigadier proceeded, with his usual composure, to arrange things to his liking. He lifted poor Hilary, as if he were a doll, and bound him completely with broad leather straps, which he buckled to their very tightest; and

then he fixed over his mouth a scarf of the delicate wool of the mountains; and then he laid him in the shade; for he really was a most honourable man, when honour came into bearing. And though (as far as his own feelings went) he would gladly have pitched this Captain Lorraine into the rush of the Zujar, he had pledged his honour to Claudia. Therefore he only gagged and bound him, and laid him out of the moonlight; which, at the time of year, might have maddened him. After this, Don Alcides d'Alcar struck flint upon punk, and lit a long cigar.

The whole of that country is full of fleas. The natives may say what they like; but they only damage their credit by denying it, or prove to a charitable mind their own insensibility. The older the deposit or the stratum is, the greater is the number of these active insects: and this old bridge, whether Moorish, or Gothic, or even Roman (as some contended), had an antiquarian stock of them.

Therefore poor Hilary, coming to himself—as he was bound to do by-and-by—grew very uneasy, but obtained no relief, through the natural solace of scratching. He was strapped so tightly that he could only roll; and if he

should be induced to roll a little injudiciously, through a gap of the parapet he must go to the bottom of the lashing water. Considering these things, he lay and listened; and though he heard many things which he disliked (and which bore a ruinous meaning to him for the rest of his young life, and all who loved him), he called his high courage to his help; and being unable to talk to himself (from the thickness of the wool between his teeth, which was a most dreadful denial to him), he thought in his inner parts—"Now, if I die, there will be no harm to say of me." He laid this to his conscience, and in contempt of all insects rolled off to sleep.

The uncontrollable outbreak of day, in the land where the sun is paramount, came like a cataract over the mountains, and scattered all darkness with leaps of light. The winding valley and the wooded slope, the white track of water, and the sombre cliffs, all sprang out of their vaporous mantle; and even the bridge of echoes looked a cheerful place to lounge on.

"A bad job surely!" said Corporal Nickles, marching with his footsteps counted, as if he were a pedometer. "Bones, us haven't searched this here ramshackle thing of a Spanish bridge.

Wherever young Cap'en can be, the Lord knows. At the bottom of the river, I dessay."

"Better if he never was born," replied Bones; "or leastwise now to be a dead one. Fifty thousand guineas in a sweep! All cometh of trusting them beggarly Dons. Corporal, what did I say to you?"

"Like a horacle, you had foreseen it, sergeant. But, we'm all right, howsomever it be. In our favour we has the hallerby."

Hilary, waking, heard all this, and he managed to sputter so through the wool, that the faithful non-commissioned officers ran to look for a wild sheep coughing.

"Is it all gone?" he asked pretty calmly, when they had cut him free at last, but he could not stand from stiffness. "Do you mean to say that the whole is gone?"

"Captain," said Bones, with a solemn salute, which Nickles repeated as junior, "every guinea are gone, as clean as a whistle; and the Lord knows where 'em be gone to."

"Yes, your honour, every blessed guinea," said Nickles, in confirmation. "To my mind it goes against the will of the Lord to have such a damned lot of money."

"You are a philosopher," answered Lor-

raine; "it is pleasing to find such a view of the case. But as for me, I am a ruined man. No captain, nor even 'your honour,' any more."

"Your honour must keep your spirits up. It mayn't be so bad as your honour thinks," they answered very kindly, well knowing that he was a ruined man, but saluting him all the more for it.

CHAPTER II.

EMPTY LOCKERS.

It may perhaps be said, without any painful exaggeration, that throughout the whole course of this grand war, struggle of great captains, and heroic business everywhere, few things made a deeper, sadder, and more sinister impression than the sudden disappearance of those fifty thousand guineas. On the other hand, it must not be supposed that the disappearance of guineas was rare. Far otherwise—as many people still alive can testify; and some of them perhaps with gratitude for their reappearance in the right quarter. But these particular fifty thousand were looked out for in so many places, and had so long been the subject of hope, as a really solid instalment of a shilling in the pound for heroes, that the most philosophical of these latter were inclined to use a short, strong word, of distinctive nationality.

Poor Hilary felt that for this bad verb his own name must be the receptive case; and he vainly looked about for any remedy or rescue. Stiff as he was in the limbs, by reason of the straps of Don Alcides, and giddy of head from the staff of that most patriotic Spaniard, he found it for some time a little hard to reflect as calmly as he should have done. Indeed it was as much as he could do to mount his horse, who (unlike his master) had stuck to his post very steadfastly, and with sadness alike of soul and body to ride down to the fatal ford. Sergeant-major Bones and Corporal Nickles also re-mounted and followed the bewildered captain, keeping behind him at a proper distance for quiet interchange of opinion.

"Corporal, now," said the sergeant-major, sliding his voice from behind one hand, "what may be your sentiments as consarns this very pecooliar and most misfortunate haxident?"

"Sergeant, it would be misbehooving," replied Nickles, who was a west-country man, "as well as an onceremonious thing for me to spake first in the matter. To you it belongeth, being the one as foretold it like a book; likewise senior hofficer."

"Corporal, you are a credit to the army

Your discretion, at your age, is wonderful. There be so few young men as remember when a man has spoken right. I am the last man in the world to desire to be overpraised, or to take to myself any sense of it. And now I wants no credit for it. To me it seems to come natteral to discern things in a sort of way that I find in nobody else a'most."

"You doos, you doos," answered Corporal Nickles. "Many's the time as I've said to myself—'Whur can I goo, to find sergeant-major, in this here trick of the henemy?' And now, sergeant, what do 'ee think of this? No fear to tell truth in spaking 'long of me."

"Corporal, I have been thinking strongly ever since us untied him. And I have been brought up in the world so much, that I means to think again of it."

"Why, sergeant, you never means to say—"

"Nickles, I means just what I means. I may be right, and yet again I may be altogether wrong; as is the way of every man. 'Let me alone' is all I say. But if I was sure as you could hold your tongue, I might have something to say to you. Not of any account, you know; but still, something."

"Now, sergeant, after all the thumps us

has seen and been through together, you never would behave onhandsome to me."

"Corporal Nickles, if you put it upon that footing, I cannot deny you. And mind you, now, my opinion is that this is a very queer case indeed."

"Now, now, to think of that! Why, sergeant, you ought to be a general!"

"Nickles, no flattery; I am above it. Not but what I might have done so well as other people, if the will of the Lord had been so. Consarning, however, of this to-do, and a precious rumpus it will be, my opinion is that we don't know half."

Speaking thus, the sergeant nodded to the corporal impressively, and jerked his thumb towards the captain in front, and winked, and then began again.

"You see, corporal, my place is to keep both eyes wide open. There was a many things as struck me up at the old Don's yonder. A carrying on in corners, and a-going to lamps to read things, and a winking out of young ladies' eyes, to my mind most unmilintary. But I might a' thought that was all young people, and a handsome young chap going on as they will, only for what one of

they dirty devils as drives them mules have said to me."

"No, now, sergeant; never, now!"

"As true as I sit this here hoss, when us come back with the sun getting up, what did that pagan say to me? You seed him, corporal, a-running up, and you might have saved me the trouble, only you was nodding forward. 'Senhor captain,' he said to me, and the whites of his eyes was full of truth, 'the young cavalier has been too soft.' That was how I made out his country gibberish; the stuff they poor beggars are born to."

"It gooeth again the grain of my skin," Corporal Nickles answered, "to hearken them fellows chattering. But, sergeant, what did he say next?"

"Well, they may chatter, or hold their tongues, to them as cannot understand them. Requireth a gift, which is a denial to most folk to understand them. And what he said, Corporal Nickles, was this — that he was coming up the river, while the carts was waiting, and afore the robbery, mind you; and he seed a young woman come on to the bridge —you knows how they goes, corporal, when they expects you to look after them."

"Sergeant, I should think so."

"Well, she come on the bridge for all the world like that. Us have seen it fifty times. And she had a white handkercher on her head, or an Ishmaelitish mantle; and she were looking out for some young chap. And our young cap'en come after her. And who do you think she were? Why, one of the daughters of the old Don up yonner!"

"Good heart alaive, now, Sergeant Bones, I can't a'most belave it!"

"Nickles, I tell you what was told me—word for word; and I say no more. But knowing what the ways of the women is, as us dragoons is so forced to do, even after a marriage and family——"

"Ah, sergeant, sergeant! we tries in vain to keep inside the strick line of dooty. I does whatever a man can do; and my father were a butcher."

"Corporal, it is one of the trials which the Lord has ordered. They do look up at one so, and they puts the middle of their lips up, and then with their bodies they turns away, as if there was nothing to look at. But, Nickles, they gives you no sort of a chance to come to the bottom of them. And this is what

young cap'en will found out. The good females always is found out at last; the same as my poor wife was. But here us are. We have relaxed the bonds of discipline with conversation. Corporal, eyes right, and wait orders!"

While these two trusty and veteran fellows had been discussing a subject far too deep for a whole brigade of them, and still were full of tender recollections (dashed with good escape), poor Hilary had been vainly spurring, here and there, and all about, himself not come to his clear mind yet, only hoping to know where the money was gone. Hope, however, upon that point was disappointed, as usual. The track of the heavy carts was clear in the gravel of the river, and up the rocky bank, and on the old Roman road towards Merida. And then, at the distance of about a furlong from the Zujar, the rut of the wooden wheels turned sharply into an elbow of a mountain-road. Here, on the hump of a difficult rise, were marks, as if many kicks, and pricks, and even stabs, had been ministered to good mules labouring heavily. There was blood on the road, and the blue shine of friction, where hard rock encountered hard iron, and the scraping of

holes in gravelly spots, and the nicks of big stones laid behind wheels to ease the tugging and afford the short relief of panting. These traces were plain, and becoming plainer as the road grew worse, for nearly a mile of the mountain-side, and then the track turned suddenly into a thicket of dark ilex, where, out of British sight and ken, the spoil had been divided.

The treasure-carts had been upset, and two of the sturdy mules, at last foundered with hard labour, lay in their blood, contented that their work was over, and that man (a greater brute than themselves) had taken all he wanted out of them. The rest had been driven or ridden on, being useful for further torment. And here on the ground were five stout coffers of good British iron; but, alas! the good British gold was flown.

At this sight, Hilary stared a little; and the five chests in the morning sun glanced back at him with such a ludicrously sad expression of emptiness, that, in spite of all his trouble, the poor young captain broke into a hearty laugh. Then his horse walked up, and sniffed at them, being reminded, perhaps, of his manger; and Hilary, dismounting, found a solitary guinea

lying in the dust, the last of fifty thousand. The trail of coarse esparto bags, into which the gold had been poured from the coffers, for the sake of easier transport, was very distinct in the parts untrampled by horses, mules, or brigands. But of all the marks there was none more conspicious than the impressions of some man's boots, larger and heavier than the rest, and appearing, over and over again, here, there, and everywhere. For a few yards up the rugged mountain, these and other footprints might be traced without much trouble, till suddenly they dispersed, grew fainter, and then wholly disappeared in trackless, hopeless, and (to a stranger) impenetrable forest.

"Thou honest guinea that would not be stolen!" cried poor Lorraine, as he returned and picked up the one remaining coin; "haply I shall never own another honest guinea. Forty-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine prefer the ownership of rogues. Last of guineas, we will not part till gold outlives humanity!"

"Now, sir, is there anything us can do?" cried Bones and Nickles, or one of them. "We has followed all the way up this here long hill, for want of better orders."

"No, my good fellows, there is nothing to be done. We cannot follow any further. I must go with all speed to report myself. Follow me if you can keep up."

The sergeant nodded to the corporal—for, loyal and steadfast as they were, suspicion was at work with them; that ugly worm which, once set going, wriggles into the stoutest heart. Surely it was a queer thing of the captain not even to let them examine the spot; but order was order, and without a word they followed the young officer back to the high road, and then, for some hours in the heat of the day, on the way towards Estremadura. At noontide they came to a bright, broad stream, known to them as the Guadalmez, a confluent of the Guadiana; and here they were challenged, to their great surprise, by a strong detachment of British hussars.

"What is your duty here?" asked Lorraine, as his uniform and face were acknowledged and saluted by sentries posted across the ford.

"To receive," cried an officer, riding through the river (for all of these people were wide awake), "Captain Lorraine and his Spanish convoy."

"I have no convoy," said Hilary, dropping

his voice into very sad music. "All is lost. It is partly your fault. You were ordered to meet me at the Zujar ford."

"This is the Zujar ford," the cavalry major answered, sternly; and Hilary's heart fell from its last hope of recovering anything.

"We have been here these three days waiting for you," continued the major, with vehemence; "we have lost all our chance of a glorious brush; we sent you advice that we were waiting for you. And now you appear without your convoy! Captain Lorraine, what does all this mean?"

"Major, my explanation is due at headquarters, rather than to you."

"And a deuced hard job you'll have to give it, or my name's not M'Rustie," the senior officer muttered, with more terseness and truth than courtesy. "I'm blessed if I'd stand in your shoes before Old Beaky for a trifle."

Poor Hilary tried in vain to look as if he took it lightly. Even his bright and buoyant nature could not lift head against the sea of troubles all in front of him.

"I have done no harm," he kept saying to himself, when, after the few words that duty demanded, he urged his stout horse forward;

and the faithful sergeant and corporal, who had shunned all inquisitive hussars, spurred vigorously after him, feeling themselves (as a Briton loves to feel himself) pregnant with mighty evidence. "What harm have I done?" asked Hilary. "I saw to everything; I worked hard. I never quitted my post, except through duty towards a lady. Any gentleman must have done what I did. To be an officer is an accident; to be a gentleman is a necessity."

"Have you felt altogether," said conscience to him, "the necessity of that necessity? Have you found it impossible to depart from a gentleman's first duty—good faith to those who trust in him? When you found yourself bewitched with a foreign lady, did you even let your first love know it? For months you have been playing fast and loose, not caring what misery you caused. And now you are fast in the trap of your looseness. Whatever happens serves you right."

"Whatever happens serves me right!" cried Hilary Lorraine, aloud, as he lifted his sword just a little way forth, for the last time to admire it, and into the sheath dropped a quick, hot tear. "I have done my duty as an officer badly; and as a gentleman far worse. But,

Mabel, if you could see me now, I think that you would forgive me."

He felt his heart grow warm again with the thought of his own Mabel; and in the courage of that thought, he stood before Lord Wellington.

CHAPTER III.

BE NO MORE OFFICER OF MINE.

THE hero of a hundred fights (otherwise called "Old Beaky") had just scraped through a choking trouble on the score of money with the grasping Portuguese regency; and now, in the year 1813, he was busier than even he had ever found himself before. He had to combine, in most delicate manner, and with exquisite nicety of time, the movements of columns whose number scarcely even to himself was clear; for the force of rivers unusually strong, and the doubt of bridges successively broken, and the hardship of the Tras os Montes, and the scattering of soldiers, who for want of money had to "subsist themselves"—which means to hunt far afield after cows, sheep, and hens—also the shifty and unpronounced tactics of the enemy, and a great many other disturbing elements, enough to make

calculation sea-sick,—a senior wrangler, or even Herr Steinitz (the Wellington of the chess-board), each in his province, might go astray, and trust at last to luck itself to cut the tangled knot for him.

It was a very grand movement, and triumphantly successful; opening up as fine a march as can be found in history, sweeping onward in victory, and closing with conquest of the Frenchmen in their own France, and nothing left to stop the advance on Paris. "Was all this luck, or was it skill?" the historian asks in wonder; and the answer, perhaps, may be found in the proverb—"Luck has a mother's love for skill."

Be that as it may, it is quite certain that Hilary, though he had shown no skill, had some little luck in the present case. For the Commander-in-Chief was a great deal too busy, and had all his officers too hard at work, to order, without fatal loss of time, a general court-martial now. Moreover, he had his own reasons for keeping the matter as quiet as possible, for at least another fortnight. Every soldier by that time would be in march, and unable to turn his back on Brown Bess; whereas now there were some who might lawfully cast

away the knapsack, if they knew that their bounty was again no better than a cloudy hope. And, again, there were some ugly pot-hooks of English questions to be dealt with.

All these things passed through the rapid mind of the General, as he reined his horse, and listened calmly to poor Lorraine's over-true report. And then he fixed his keen grey eyes upon Hilary, and said shortly—

"What were you doing upon that bridge?"

"That is a question," replied Lorraine, while marvelling at his own audacity, "which I am pledged by my honour, as a gentleman, not to answer."

"By your duty as an officer, in a place of special trust, you are bound to answer it."

"General, I cannot. My lord, as I rather must call you now, I wish I could answer; but I cannot."

"You have no suspicion who it was that stole the money, with so much care?"

"I have a suspicion, but nothing more; and it makes me feel treacherous, to suspect it."

"Never mind that. We have rogues to deal with. What is your suspicion?"

"My lord, I am sorry to say that again, I cannot, in honour, answer you."

"Captain Lorraine, I have no time to spare." Lord Wellington had been more than once interrupted by despatches. "Once and for all, do you mean to give any, or no explanation of your conduct, in losing £50,000?"

"General, all my life, and the honour of my family, depend upon what I do now."

"Then go and seek advice, Lorraine," the General answered kindly, for his heart was kind; and he had taken a liking for this young fellow, and knew a little of his family.

"I have no one to go to for advice, my lord. What is your advice to me?" With these words, Hilary looked so wretched and yet so proud from his well-bred face, and beautifully-shaped blue eyes, that his General stopped from his hurry to pity him. And then he looked gently at the poor young fellow.

"This is the most irregular state of things I have ever had to deal with. You have lost a month's pay of our army, and enough to last them half a year; and you seem to think that you have done great things, and refuse all explanation. Is there any chance of recovering the money?"

"There might be, my lord, if we were not likely to advance too rapidly."

"There might be, if we threw away our campaign! You have two courses before you; at least, if I choose to offer them. Will you take my advice, if I offer the choice?"

"I am only too glad to have any choice; and anything chosen for me by you."

"Then this is just how you stand, Lorraine —if we allow the alternative. You may demand a court-martial, or you may resign your commission. On the other hand, as you know, a court-martial should at once be held upon you. What answer are you prepared to make, when asked why you left your convoy?"

"I should be more stubborn to them than even your lordship has let me be to you."

"Then, Captain Lorraine, resign your commission. With my approval, it can be done."

"Resign my commission!" Lorraine exclaimed, reeling as if he had received a shot, and catching at the mane of the General's horse, without knowing what he was doing. "Oh no, I never could do that."

"Very well. I have given you my advice. You prefer your own decision; and I have other things to attend to. Captain Money will receive your sword. You are under arrest, till we can form a court."

"My lord, it would break my father's heart, if he were to hear of such a thing. I suppose I had better resign my commission, if I may."

"Put that in writing, and send it to me. I will forward it to the Horse Guards with a memorandum from myself. I am sorry to lose you, Captain Lorraine; you might have done well, if you had only proved as sensible as you are active and gallant. But one word more—what made you stop short at the ford of a little mountain-stream? I chose you as knowing the country well. You must have known that the Zujar ford was twenty miles further on your road."

"I know all that country too well, my lord. We halted at the real Zujar ford. General Hill's detachment stopped at the ford of the Guadalmez. That is wrongly called the Zujar there. The Zujar has taken a great sweep to the east, and fallen into the Guadalmez and Guadalemar. Major M'Rustie must have been misled; and no doubt it was done on purpose. I have my information on the very best authority."

"May I ask, upon what authority? Are you pledged in honour to conceal even that?"

"No, I may tell that, I do believe," said

Hilary, after one moment's thought, and with his old bright simple smile. "I had it, my lord, from the two young ladies—the daughters of the Count of Zamora."

"Aha!" cried Lord Wellington (being almost as fond of young ladies as they of him, and touched perhaps for the moment by the magic of a sweet young smile), "I begin to understand the bridge-affair. But I fear that young ladies can hardly be cited as authorities on geography. Otherwise, we might make out a case against the Spanish authorities for sending our escort to the wrong place. And the Spanish escort, as you say, took the other for the proper place?"

"Certainly, my lord, they did. And so did the Count, and everybody. Is there any hope now that I may be acquitted?"

At a moment's notice from hope that she would like to come back to her lodgings, Hilary opened his eyes so wide, and his heart so wide, and every other place that hope is generally partial to, that the great commander (who trusted as little, as possible, of his work to hope) could not help smiling a quick, dry smile. And he felt some pain, as, word by word, he demolished hope in Hilary.

'The point of the thing is the money, Lorraine. And that we never could recover from the Spaniards, even if it was lost through them; for the very good reason that they have not got it. And even supposing the mistake to be theirs, and our escort to have been sent astray; you were a party to that mistake. And more than that; you were bound to see that the treasure did not cross the river, until our men were there. Did you do so?"

"Oh, if I only had done that, I should not be so miserable."

"Exactly so. You neglected your duty. Take more care of your own money than you have taken of the public cash, Lorraine. Do as I told you. And now, good-bye."

The General, who had long been chafing at so much discourse just now, offered his hand to Lorraine, as one who was now a mere civilian.

"Is there no hope?" asked Hilary, dropping a tear into the mane of the restive horse. "Can I never be restored, my lord?"

"Never; unless the money is made good, before we go into quarters again. A heavy price for a captain's commission!"

"If it is made good, my lord, will you restore me from this deep disgrace?"

"The question will be for his Royal Highness. But I think that in such an extraordinary case, you may rely—at any rate you may rely upon my good word, Lorraine."

"I thank you, my lord. The money shall be paid. Not for the sake of my commission, but for the honour of our family."

CHAPTER IV.

FAREWELL, ALL YOU SPANISH LADIES.

THE British army now set forth on its grand career of victory, with an entirely new set of breeches. Interception of convoys, and other adverse circumstances, had kept our heroes from having any money, although they had new pockets. And the British Government, with keen insight into British nature, had insisted upon it, in the last contract, that the pockets should be all four inches wide. With this the soldiers were delighted—for all the very bravest men are boys—and they put their knuckles into their pockets, and felt what a lot of money they would hold. And though the money did not come, there was the delightful readiness for it. It might come any day, for all they knew; and what fools they must have looked, if their pockets would not hold it! In short, these men

laid on their legs, to march with empty pockets; and march they did, as history shows, all the better for not having sixpence.

Though Hilary was so heartily liked, both in his own regiment and by the Staff, time (which had failed for his trial) also failed for pity of the issue. The General had desired that as little as possible should be said; and even if any one had wished to argue, the hurry and bustle would have stopped his mouth. Lorraine's old comrades were far in advance; and the Staff, like a shuttle, was darting about; and the hills and the valleys were clapping their hands to the happy accompaniment of the drum.

Casting by every outward sign that he ever had been a soldier, Hilary Lorraine set forth on his sad retreat from this fine advance; afoot, and bearing on his shoulder a canvas bag on a truncheon of olive. He would not accept any knapsack, pouch, or soldier's usage of any kind. He had lost all right to that, being now but a shattered young gentleman on his way home.

However, in one way he showed good sense. By losing such a heap of the public money, he had learned to look a little better after his own; so he drew every farthing that he could get of his father's cash and his grand-

mother's, but scorned to accept the arrears of his pay; because he could not get them.

To a man of old, or of middle age, it has become (or it ought to become) a matter of very small account that he has thrown away his life. He has seen so many who have done the like (through indolence, pride, bad temper, reserve, timidity, or fool's confidence—into which the most timid men generally rush), that he knows himself now to be a fine example, instead of standing forth as a very unpleasant exception to the rule. And now, if he takes it altogether, he finds many fellows who have done much worse, and seem all the better for it. Has he missed an appointment? They cut down the salary. Did he bang his back-door on a rising man? Well, the man, since he rose, has forgotten his hosts. Has he married a shrew? She looks after his kitchen. Remembering and reflecting thus, almost any good man must refuse to be called, without something to show for it, a bigger fool than his neighbours.

But a young man is not yet late enough to know what human life is. He is sure that he sees by foresight all the things which, as they pass us, leave so little time for insight; and of which the only true view is calm and pleasant

retrospect. And then, like some high-stepping colt brought suddenly on his knees, to a sense of long-worn granite, he flounders about in amazement so, that if the fatal damage is not done to him, he does it.

Lorraine was not one of those who cry, as the poets of all present ages do—"Let the world stand still, until I get on." Nevertheless he was greatly downcast, to find his own little world so early brought to a sudden stand-still. And it seems to be sadly true that the more of versatile quickness a man has in him, the less there remains to expect of him, in the way of pith and substance. But Hilary now was in no condition to go into any philosophies. He made up his mind to walk down to the sea, and take ship at some good seaport; and having been pleased at Malaga by the kind, quiet ways of the people, and knowing the port to be unobserved by French and American cruisers, he thought that he might as well try his luck once more in that direction.

Swift of foot as he was, and lightsome, when his heart was toward, he did not get along very fast on this penitential journey. So that it was the ninth day, or the tenth, from his being turned out of the army, when he came once

more to the "Bridge of Echoes," henceforth his "Bridge of Sighs" for ever. Here he stopped and ate his supper, for his appetite was good again; and then he looked up and down the Zujar, and said to himself what a fool he was. For lo! where Claudia had clung to him trembling over a fearful abyss of torrent (as it seemed by moonlight), there now was no more than nine inches of water, gliding along very pleasantly. These Spanish waters, were out of his knowledge, as much as the Spanish ladies were; but though the springs might have been much higher a fortnight ago than they were now, Hilary could not help thinking that Claudia, instead of fainting on the verge, might have jumped over, at any moment, without spraining her very neat ankles. And then he remembered that it was this same beautiful and romantic girl who had proved to the satisfaction of the Spanish Colonel that this was the only Zujar ford, for that river merged its name where it joined the longer and larger Guadalmez. Upon this question there long had arisen a hopeful dilemma in Hilary's mind, which stated itself in this form. If this were the true Zujar ford, then surely the Spaniards, the natives of the country, were bound to apprise General

Hill thereof. If this were not the Zujar ford, then the Spaniards were liable for the treasure beyond this place, and as far as the true one. The latter was of course the stronger horn of the dilemma; but unluckily there arose against it a mighty monster of fact, quite strong enough to take even the Minotaur by the horns. Suppose the brave Spaniards to owe the money, it was impossible to suppose that they could pay it.

This reflection gave Hilary such a pain in his side that he straightway dropped it. And beholding the vivid summer sky beginning to darken into deeper blue, and the juts of the mountainous places preparing to throw light and shadow lengthwise, and the simmering of the sun-heat sinking into white mists of the vales, he made up his mind to put best foot foremost, and sleep at Monte Argento. For he felt quite sure of the goodwill and sympathy of that pure hidalgo, the noble Count of Zamora; and from the young Donnas he might learn something about his misadventure. He could not bring himself to believe that Claudia had been privy to the dastardly outrage upon himself. His nature was too frank and open to foster such mean ideas. Young ladies were the

best and sweetest, the kindest and the largest-hearted, of created beings. So they were, and so they are; but all rules have exceptions.

Hilary, as he walked up the hill (down which he had ridden so gallantly, scarcely more than a fortnight since), was touched with many thinkings. The fall of the sun (which falls and rises over us so magnanimously) had that power upon his body which it has on all things. The sun was going; he had done his work, and was tired of looking at people; mount as you might, the sun was sinking, and disdained all shadows and oblation of memorial.

Through the growth of darkness thus, and the urgency of froward trees (that could not fold their arms and go to sleep without some rustling), and all the many quiet sounds that nurse the repose of evening, Lorraine came to the heavy gates that had once secured the money. The porter knew him, and was glad to let in the young British officer, whose dollars leaping right and left had made him many household friends. But in the hall the old steward met him, and with many grave inclinations of his head and body, mourned that he could not receive the illustrious Senhor.

"There is in the castle no one now, but my

noble mistress the Donna Camilla. His Excellence the Count is away, far from home at the wars."

"And the young Lady Claudia, where is she? I beg your pardon, steward, if I ought not to ask the question."

For the ancient steward had turned away at the sound of Donna Claudia's name; and pretending to be very deaf, began to trim a lamp or two.

"Will the Donna Camilla permit me to see her for one minute, or for two perhaps? Her father is from home; but you, Senhor steward, know what is correct, and thus will act."

Hilary had not been so frightened at his own temerity in the deadly breach of Badajos, as now when he felt himself softly slipping a brace of humble English guineas into this lofty Spaniard's palm. The steward, without knowing what he was about, except that he was trimming a very stubborn lamp, felt with his thumb that there must be a brace, and with contemptuous indignation let them slide into his pocket.

"Senhor, I will do only what is right. I am of fifty years almost in this noble family. I am trusted, as I deserve. What I do is what the

Count himself would do. But a very sad thing has happened. We are obliged now to be most careful. The Senhor knows what the ladies are?"

"Senhor steward, that is the very thing that I never do know. You know them well. But, alas! I do not."

"Alas! I do," said the steward, panting, and longing to pour forth experience; but he saw some women peeping down-stairs, and took the upper hand of them. "Senhor, it is not worth the knowing. Our affairs are loftier. Go back, all you women, and prepare for bed. Have you not had your supper? Now, Senhor, in here for a minute, if you please; patience passeth all things."

But Hilary's patience itself was passed, as he waited in this little ante-room, ere the steward returned with the Donna Camilla, and, with a low bow, showed her in, and posted himself in a corner. She was dressed in pure white, which Hilary knew to be the mourning costume of the family.

The hand which the young Andalusian lady offered was cold and trembling, and her aspect and manner were timid and abashed.

"Begone!" she cried to the worthy steward,

with a sudden indignation, which perhaps relieved her. "What now shall I do?" said the steward to himself, with one hand spread upon his silver beard; "is this one also to run away?"

"Begone!" said Camilla to him once more, looking so grand that he could only go; and then quietly bolting the old gentleman out. After which she returned to Hilary.

"Senhor Captain, I am very sorry to offer you any scenes of force. You have had too many from our family."

"I do not understand you, Senhorita. From your family I have received nothing but kindness, hospitality, and love."

"Alas, Senhor! and heavy blows. Our proverb is, 'Love leads to blows;' and this was our return to you. But she is of our family no more."

"I am at a loss. It is my stupidity. I do not know at all what is meant."

"In sincerity, the cavalier has no suspicion who smote down and robbed him?"

"In sincerity, the cavalier knows not; although he would be very glad to know."

"Is it possible? Oh the dark treachery! It was my cousin who struck you down; my sister who betrayed you."

"Ah, well!" said Lorraine, in a moment, seeing how she trembled for his words, and how terribly she felt the shame; "if it be so, I am still in her debt. She saved my life once, and she spared it again. Now, as you see, I am none the worse. The only loser is the British Government, which can well afford to pay."

"It is not so. The loss is ours, of honour, faith, and gratitude."

"I pray you not to take it so. Everybody knows that the fault was mine. And whatever has happened only served me right."

"It served you aright for trusting us! It is too true. It is a bitter saying. My father mourns, and I mourn. She never more will be his daughter, and never more my sister."

"I pray you," said Hilary, taking her hand, as she turned away to control herself—"I pray you, Donna Camilla, to look at this little matter sensibly. I now understand the whole of it. Your sister is of very warm and strong patriotic sentiments. She felt that this money would do more good, as the property of the *partidas*, than as the pay of the British troops. And so she exerted herself to get it. All good Spaniards would have thought the same."

"She exerted herself to disgrace herself, and

to disgrace her family. The money is not among the *partidas*, but all in the bags of her Cousin Alcides, whom she has married without dispensation, and with her father's sanction forged. Can you make the best of that, Senhor?"

Hilary certainly could not make anything very good out of this. And cheerful though his nature was, and tolerably magnanimous, he could not be expected to enjoy the treatment he had met with. To be knocked down and robbed was bad enough; to be disgraced was a great deal worse; but to be cut out by a rival, betrayed into his power, and made to pay for his wedding with trust-money belonging to poor soldiers,—all this was enough to embitter even the sweet and kind nature of young Lorraine. Therefore his face was unlike itself, as he turned it away from the young Spanish lady, being much taken up with his own troubles, and not yet ready to make light of them.

"Will you not speak to me, Senhor? I am not in any way guilty of this. I would have surrendered the whole of my life——"

"I pray you to pardon me," Hilary answered. "I am not accustomed to this sort of thing. Where are they now? Can I follow them?"

"Even a Spaniard could not find them. My brothers would not attempt it. Alcides knows every in and out. He has hidden his prize in the mountains of the north."

"If that is so, I can only hasten to say farewell to the Spanish land."

"To go away, and to never come back! Is it possible that you could do that?"

"It may be a bitter thing; but I must try. I am now on my way to Malaga. Being discharged from the British army, I have only to find my own way home."

"It cannot be; it never can be! Our officers lose a mule's-load of money, or spend it at cards; and we keep them still. Senhor Captain, you must have made some mistake. They never could discharge you!"

"If there has been any mistake," said Hilary, regaining his sweet smile, with his sense of humour, "it is on their part, not on mine. Discharged I am; and the British army, as well as the Spanish cause, must do their best to get on without me."

"Saints of heaven! And you will go, and never come back any more?"

"With the help of the saints, that is my hope. What other hope is left to me?"

Camilla de Montalvan did not answer this question with her lips, but more than answered it with her eyes. She fell back suddenly, as if with terror, into a great blue velvet chair, and her black tresses lay on her snowy arms, although her shapely neck reclined. Then with a gentle sigh, as if recovering from a troubled dream, she raised her eyes to Hilary's, and let them dwell there long enough to make him wonder where he was. And he saw that he had but to speak the word to become the owner of grace and beauty, wealth, and rank in the Spanish army, and (at least for a time) true love.

But, alas! a burned child dreads the fire. There still was a bump on Lorraine's head from the staff of Don Alcides; and Camilla's eyes were too like Claudia's to be trusted all at once. Moreover, Hilary thought of Mabel, of all her goodness, and proven trust; and Spanish ladies, though they might be queens, had no temptation for him now. And perhaps he thought—as quick men think of little things unpleasantly—"I do not want a wife whose eyes will always be deeper than my own." And so he resolved to be off as soon as it could be done politely.

Camilla, having been disappointed more than once of love's reply, clearly saw what was going on, and called her pride to the rescue. The cavalier should not say farewell to her; she would say it to the cavalier. Also, she would let him know one thing.

"If you must leave us, Captain Lorraine, and return to your native land, you will at least permit me to do what my father would have done if he were at home—to send you with escort to Malaga. The roads are dangerous. You must not go alone."

"I thank you. I am scarcely worth robbing now. I can sing in the presence of the bandit."

"You will grant me this last favour, I am sure, if I tell you one thing. It was not that wicked Claudia, who drew the iron from your wound."

"It was not the Donna Claudia! To whom then do I owe my life?"

"Can you not, by any means, endeavour to conjecture?"

"How glad I am!" he answered, as he kissed her cold and trembling hand—"the lady to whom I owe my life is gentle, good, and truthful."

"There is no debt of life, Senhor. But would it have grieved you, now, if Claudia had done it? Then be assured that she did not do it. Her manner never was to do anything good to any one. And yet, how wonderful are things! Everybody loved her. It is no good to be good, I fear. Pedro, you are at the door then, are you? You have taken care to hear everything. Go order a repast for the cavalier of the best we have, and men and horses to conduct him to Malaga. Be quick, I say, and show no hesitation." At her urgent words the steward went, yet grumbling and reluctant, and glancing over his shoulder all the way along the passage. "How that old man amuses me!" she continued, to the wondering Hilary, who had never dreamed that she could speak sharply; "ever since my sister's disgrace he thinks that his duty is to watch me. Ah! what am I to be watched for?"

"Because," said Hilary, "there is no Spaniard who would not long to steal the beautiful young Donna."

"No Spaniard shall ever do that. But haste; you are in such hurry for the sunny land of Anglia."

"I do not understand the Senhorita. Why

should I hurry to my great disgrace? I shall never hear the last of the money I have lost."

"'Tis all money, money, money, in the noble England. But the friends of the Captain need not mourn; for the money was not his, nor theirs."

This grandly philosophical, and most truly Spanish, view of the case destroyed poor Hilary's last fond hope of any sense of a debt of honour, on the part of the Montalvans. If the money lost had been Hilary's own, the Count of Zamora (all compact of chivalry and rectitude) might have discovered that he was bound to redeem his daughter's robbery. But as it stood, there was no such chance. Private honour is a mountain rill that does not always lead to any lake of public honesty. All Spaniards would bow to the will of the Lord, that British guineas should slip into Spanish hands so providentially.

"We do not take things just so," said young Lorraine, quite sadly. "I must go home and restore the money. Donna Camilla, I must say farewell."

"You will come again when you are restored? When you have proved that you did not take the money for yourself, Senhor, you will remember your Spanish friends?"

"I never shall forget my Spanish friends. To you I owe my life, and hold it (as long as I hold it) at your command."

"It is generously said, Senhor. Generosity always makes me weep. And so, farewell."

CHAPTER V.

GOING UP THE TREE.

In all the British army—then a walking wood of British oak, without a yard of sapling—there was no bit of better stuff than the five feet and a quarter (allowing for his good game leg) of Major, by this time Colonel Clumps. This officer knew what he had to do, and he made a point of doing it. Being short of imagination, he despised that foolish gift, and marvelled over and over again at others for laughing so at nothing. That whimsical tickling of the veins of thought, which some people give so and some receive (with equal delight on either side), humour, or wit, or whatever it is, to Colonel Clumps was a vicious thing. Everything must be either true or false. If it were true, who could laugh at the truth? If it were false, who should laugh at a falsehood?

Many a good man has reasoned thus, re-

ducing laughter under law, and himself thenceforth abandoned by that lawless element. Colonel Clumps had always taken solid views of everything, and the longer he lived in the world the less he felt inclined to laugh at it. But, that laughter might not be robbed of all its dues and royalties, just nature had provided that, as the Colonel would not laugh at the world, the world should laugh at the Colonel. He had been the subject of more bad jokes, one-sided pleasantries, and heartless hoaxes, than any other man in the army; with the usual result that now he scarcely ever believed the truth, while he still retained, for the pleasure of his friends, a tempting stock of his native confidence in error. So it came to pass that when Colonel Clumps (after the battle of Vittoria, in which he had shown conspicuous valour) was told of poor Hilary's sad disgrace, he was a great deal too clever and astute to believe a single word of it.

"It is ludicrous, perfectly ludicrous!" he said, that being the strongest adjective he knew to express pure impossibility. "A gallant young fellow to be cashiered without even a court-martial! How dare you tell me such a thing, sir? I am not a man to be rough-ridden.

Nobody ever has imposed on me. And the boy is almost a sort of cousin of my own. The first family in the kingdom, sir."

The Colonel flew into so great a rage, twisting his white hair, and stamping his lame heel, that the officer who had brought the news, being one of his own subalterns, wisely retired into doubts about it, and hinted that nobody knew the reason, and therefore that it could not be true.

"If I mention that absurd report about young Lorraine," thought Colonel Clumps, when writing to Lady de Lampnor, "I may do harm, and I can do no good, but only get myself laughed at as the victim of a stupid hoax. So I will say no more about him, except that I have not seen him lately, being so far from head-quarters, and knowing how old Beaky is driving the Staff about." And before the brave Colonel found opportunity of taking the pen in hand again, he was heavily wounded in a skirmish with the French rear-guard, and ordered home, as hereafter will appear.

It also happened that Mr. Capper's friends, those two officers who had earned so little of Mabel's gratitude by news of Hilary, were harassed and knocked about too much to find

any time for writing letters. And as the *Gazette* in those days neglected the smaller concerns of the army, and became so hurried by the march of events, and the rapid sequence of battles, that the doings of junior officers slipped through its fingers until long afterwards, the result was that neither Coombe Lorraine nor Old Applewood farm received for months any news of the young staff officer. Neither did he yet present himself at either of those homesteads. For, as the ancient saying runs, misfortunes never come alone. The ship in which Hilary sailed for England from the port of Cadiz—for he found no transport at Malaga—*The Flower of Kent*, as she was called, which appeared to him an excellent omen, was nipped in the bud of her homeward voyage. She met with a nasty French privateer to the southward of Cape Finisterre. In vain she crowded sail, and tried every known resource of seamanship; the Frenchman had the heels of her, and laid her on board at sundown. Lorraine, and two or three old soldiers, battered and going to hospital, had no idea of striking, except in the British way of doing it. But the master and the mate knew better, and stopped the hopeless conflict. So the

Frenchman sacked and scuttled the ship in the most scientific manner, and, wanting no prisoners, landed the crew on a desolate strand of Gallicia, without any money to save them.

This being their condition, it is the proper thing to leave them so; for nothing is more unwise than to ask, or rather to "institute inquiries," as to the doings of people who are much too likely to require a loan; therefore return we to the South Down hills.

The wet, ungenial, and stormy summer of 1813 was passing into a wetter, more cheerless, and most tempestuous autumn. On the northern slopes of the light-earthed hills the moss had come over the herbage, and the sweet nibble of the sheep was souring. The huddled trees (which here and there rise just to the level of the ridge, and then seem polled by the sweep of the wind-rush), the bushes also, and the gorse itself, stood, or rather stooped, beneath the burden of perpetual wet. The leaves hung down in a heavy drizzle, unable to detach themselves from the welting of the unripe stalks; the husk of the beech and the key of the ash were shrivelled for want of kernels, and the clusters of the hazel-nut had no sun-varnish on them. The weakness of

the summer sun (whether his face was spotted overmuch, or too immaculate), and the humour of clouds, and the tenor of winds, and even the tendency of the earth itself to devolve into eccentricity,—these, and a hundred other causes, for the present state of the weather were found, according to where they were looked for. On one point only there was no contradiction,—things were not as they ought to be.

Even the rector of West Lorraine, a man of most cheerful mind, and not to be put down by any one, laying to the will of the Lord his failures, and to his own merits all good success, —even the Rev. Struan Hales was scarcely a match for the weather. Sportsmen in those days did not walk in sevenfold armour, for fear of a thorn, or a shower, or a cow-dab; nor skulked they two or three hours in a rick, awaiting the joy of one butchering minute. Fair play for man, and dog, and gun, and fur and feather, was then the rule; and a day of sport meant a day of work, and healthful change, and fine exercise. Therefore, Mr. Hales went forth with his long and heavily-loaded gun, to comfort himself and refresh his mind, whatever the weather might be about, upon six days out of every seven. The hounds had not

begun to meet; the rivers were all in flood, of course; the air was so full of rheumatism that no man could crook his arm to write a sermon, or work a concordance. Two sick old women had taken a fancy for pheasant boiled with artichoke;—willy-nilly, the parson found it a momentous duty now to shoot.

And who went with him? There is no such thing as consistence of the human mind; yet well as this glorious truth was known, and bemoaned by every one for his neighbour's sake —not they, not all the parish, nor even we of the enlarged philosophy, could or can ever be brought to believe our own eyes that it was Bonny! But, in spite of all impossibility, it was; and the explanation requires relapse.

Is it within recollection that the rector once shot a boy in a hedge? The boy had clomb up into an ivied stump, for purposes of his own, combining espial with criticism. All critics deserve to be shot, if they dare to cross the grand aims of true enterprise. They pepper, and are peppered; but they generally get the best of it. And so did this boy that was shot in the hedge. Being of a crafty order, he dropped, and howled and rolled so piteously, that poor Mr. Hales, although he had fired at a

distance of more than fourscore yards from the latent vagabond, cast down his gun in the horror of having slain a fellow-creature. But when he ran up, and turned him over to search for the fatal injury, the boy so vigorously kicked and roared, that the parson had great hopes of him. After some more rolling, a balance was struck; the boy had some blue spots under his skin, and a broad gold guinea to plaster them.

Now this boy was not our Bonny, nor fit in any way to compare with him. But uncivilized minds are very jealous; and next to our Bonny, this boy that was shot was the furthest from civilization of all the boys of the neighbourhood. Therefore, of course, bitter jealousy raged betwixt him and the real outsider. Now the boy that was shot got a new pair of boots from the balance of his guinea, and a new pair of legs to his nether garments, under his mother's guidance. And to show what he was, and remove all doubts of the genuine expenditure, his father and mother combined and pricked him, with a pin in a stick, to the Sunday-school. Here Madge Hales (the second and strongest daughter of the church) laid hold of him, and converted him into right views of theology, hanging upon sound pot-hooks.

But a far greater mind than Bill Harkles could own was watching this noble experiment. Bonny had always hankered kindly after a knowledge of "pictur-books." The gifts of nature were hatching inside him, and chipped at the shell of his chickenhood. He had thrashed Bill Harkles in two fair fights, without any aid from his donkey, and he felt that Bill's mind had no right whatever to be brought up to look down on him.

This boy, therefore, being sneered at by erudite Bill Harkles, knew that his fists would be no fair answer, and retired to his cave. Here he looked over his many pickings, and proudly confessing inferior learning, refreshed himself with superior wealth. And this meditation, having sound foundation, satisfied him till the next market-day—the market-day at Steyning. Bonny had not much business here, but he always liked to look at things; and sometimes he got a good pannier of victuals, and sometimes he got nothing. For the farmers of the better sort put off their dinner till two o'clock, when the prime of the market was over, and then sat down to boiled beef and carrots in the yard of the White Horse Inn, and often did their best in that way.

Of this great "ordinary"—great at any rate as regards consumption—Farmer Gates, the churchwarden, was by ancestral right the chairman; but for several market-days the vice-presidency had been vacant. A hot competition had raged, and all Steyning had thrilled with high commotion about the succession to the knife and fork at the bottom of the table; until it was announced amid general applause that Bottler was elected. It was a proud day for this good pigman, and perhaps a still prouder one for Bonny, when the new vice-president was inducted into the Windsor chair at the foot of the long and ancient table; and it marked the turning-point in the life of more than one then present.

The vice-president's cart was in the shed close by, and on the front lade sat Bonny, sniffing the beauty of the "silver-side," and the luscious suggestions of the marrow-bone. Polly longed fiercely to be up there with him; but her mother's stern sense of decorum forbade; the pretty Miss Bottlers would be toasted after dinner,—and was one to be spied in a pig-cart? No sooner was the cloth removed, than the chairman proposed, in most feeling and eloquent language, the health of his new colleague.

And now it was Bottler's reply which created a grand revolution in Steyning. With graceful modesty he ascribed his present proud position, the realization of his fondest hopes, neither to his well-known integrity, industry, strict attention to business, nor even the quality of his bacon. All these things, of course, contributed; but "what was the grand element of his unparalleled success in life?" A cry of "white stockings!" from the Bramber pig-sticker was sternly suppressed, and the man kicked out. "The grand element of his success in life was his classical education!"

Nobody knowing what was meant by this, thunders of applause ensued; until it was whispered from cup to cup that Bottler, when he was six years old, had been three months at the Grammar School. He might have forgotten every word he had learned, but any one might see that it was dung dug in. So a dozen of the farmers resolved at once to have their children Latined; and Bonny in his inmost heart aspired to some education. What was the first step to golden knowledge? He put this question to himself obscurely, as he rode home on his faithful Jack, with all the marrow-bones of the great feast rattling in a bag behind

him. From the case of Bill Harkles he reasoned soundly, that the first thing to do was to go and get shot.

On the following day—the month being August, or something very near it, in the year 1812 (a year behind the time we got on to), Mr. Hales, to keep his hand in, took his favourite flint-gun down, and patted it, and reprimed it. He had finished his dinner, it had been a good one; and his partner in life had been lamenting the terrible price of butcher's meat. She did not see how it could end in anything short of a wicked rebellion, when the price of bread was put with it. And the rector had answered, with a wink to Cecil, "Order no meat for to-morrow, my dear, nor even for the next day. We shall see what we shall see." With this power of promise, he got on his legs, and stopped all who were fain to come after him. He knew every coney and coney's hole on the glebe, and on the clerk's land; and they all would now be out at grass, and must be treated gingerly. He was going to shoot for the pot, as sportsmen generally did in those days.

With visions of milky onions, about to be poured on a broad and well-boiled back, the rector (after sneaking through a furzy gate)

peeped down a brown trench of the steep hill-side; here he spied three little sandy juts of recent excavation, and on each of them sat a hunch-backed coney, proud of the labours of the day, and happily curling his whiskers. The rector, peering downward, saw the bulging over their large black eyes, and the prick of their delicate ears, and their gentle chewing of the grass-blade. There was no chance of a running shot, for they would pop into earth in a moment; so he tried to get two of them into a line, and then he pulled his trigger. The nearest rabbit fell dead as a stone; but the rector could scarcely believe his eyes, when through the curls of the smoke he beheld, instead of the other rabbit, a ragged boy rolling, and kicking, and holloaing!

"Am I never to shoot without shooting a boy?" cried the parson, rushing forward. "Another guinea! A likely thing! I vow I will only pay a shilling this time. The sport would ruin a bishop!"

But Mr. Hales found to his great delight that the boy was not touched by a shot, nor even made pretence to be so. He had craftily crept through the bushes from below, and quietly lurked near the rabbits' hole, and after

the shot, had darted forth, and thrown himself cleverly on the wounded rabbit, who otherwise must have got away to die a lingering death in his burrow. The quickness and skill of the boy, and the luck of thus bagging both rabbits, so pleased the rector that he gave him sixpence, and bade him follow, to carry the game and to see more sport. Bonny had a natural turn for sport, which never could be beaten out of him, and to get it encouraged by the rector of the parish was indeed a godsend. And in his excitement at every shot, he poured forth his heart about rabbits, and hares, and wood-queists, and partridges, and even pheasants.

"Why, you know more than I do!" said the rector, kindly laying his hand on the shoulder of the boy, after loading for his tenth successful shot. "How ever have you picked up all these things? The very worst poacher of the coming age; or else the best game-keeper."

"I looks about, or we does, me and Jack together," answered Bonny, with one of his broadest and most genuine grins; and the gleam of his teeth, and the twinkle of his eyes, enforced the explanation.

"Come to my house in the morning, Bonny,

said the rector. And that was the making of him. For the boy that cleaned the knives and boots, had never conscientiously filled that sphere, though he was captain of the Bible-class. And now he had taken the measles so long, that they had put him to earth the celery. Here was an opening, and Bonny seized it; and though he made very queer work at first, his native ability carried him on, till he put a fine polish on everything. From eighteen-pence a week he rose to two and threepence, within nine months; and to this he soon added the empty bottles, and a commission upon the grease-pot!

Even now, all has not been told; for by bringing the cook good news of her sweetheart, and the parlourmaid dry sticks to light her fire, and by showing a tender interest in the chilblains of even the scullerymaid, he became such a favourite in the kitchen, that the captain of the Bible-class defied him to a battle in the wash-house. The battle was fought, and victory, though long doubtful, perched at last upon the banner of brave Bonny; and with mutual esteem, and four black eyes, the heroes parted.

After this, all ran smooth. The rector (who had enjoyed the conflict from his study-window, without looking off, more than he could help,

from a sermon upon "Seek peace, and ensue it"), as soon as he had satisfied himself which of the two boys hit the straighter, went to an ancient wardrobe, and examined his bygone hunting-clothes. Here he found an old scarlet coat, made for him thirty years ago at Oxford, but now a world too small; and he sighed that he had no son to inherit it. Also a pair of old buckskin breeches, fitter for his arms than his legs just now. The moths were in both; they were growing scurfy; sentiment must give way to sense. So Bonny got coat and breeches; and the maids with merry pinches, and screams of laughter, and consolatory kisses, adapted them. He showed all this grandeur to his donkey Jack, and Jack was in two minds about snapping at it.

This matter being cleared, and the time brought up, here we are at West Lorraine in earnest, in the month of October, 1813; long after Hilary's shocking disgrace, but before any of his own people knew it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WOEBURN.

"WHAT a lazy loon that Steenie Chapman is!" said the rector, for about the twentieth time, one fine October morning. "He knows what dreadful weather we get now, and yet he can't be here by nine o'clock! Too bad I call it; too bad a great deal. Send away the teapot, Caroline."

"But, my dear," answered Mrs. Hales, who always made the best of every one, "you forget how very bad the roads must be, after all the rain we have had. And I am sure he will want a cup of tea after riding through such flooded roads."

"Tea indeed!" the parson muttered, as he strode in and out of the room, with his shot-belt dancing on his velveteen shooting-coat, and snapped his powder-flask impatiently; "Steenie's

tea comes from the case, not the caddy. And the first gleam of sunshine I've seen for a week, after that heavy gale last night. It will rain before twelve o'clock, for a guinea. Cecil, run and see if you can find that boy Bonny. I shall start by myself, and send Bonny down the road with a message for Captain Chapman."

"The huntsman came out of the back-kitchen, Cecil, about two minutes ago," said Madge, who never missed a chance of a cut at Bonny, because he had thrashed her pet Bible-scholar; "he was routing about, with his red coat on, for scraps of yellow soap and candle-ends."

"What a story!" cried Cecil, who was Bonny's champion, being his schoolmistress; "I wish your Dick was half as good a boy. He gets honester every day almost. I'll send him to you, papa, in two seconds. I suppose you'll speak to him at the side-door."

At a nod from her father, away she ran, while Madge followed slowly to help in the search; and finding that the boy had left the house, they took different paths in the garden to seek him, or overtake him on his homeward way. In a few moments Cecil, as she passed some laurels, held up her hand to recall her

sister, and crossed the grass towards her very softly, with finger on lip and a mysterious look.

"Hush! and come here very quietly," she whispered; "I'll show you something as good as a play." Then the two girls peeped through the laurel bush, and watched with great interest what was going on.

In an alley of the kitchen-garden sat Bonny upon an old sea-kale pot, clad in his red coat and white breeches, and deeply meditating. Before him, upon an espalier tree, hung a tempting and beautiful apple, a scarlet pearmain, with its sleek sides glistening in the slant of the sunbeams.

"I'll lay you a shilling he steals it," Madge whispered into the ear of her sister. "Done," replied Cecil, with her hand before her mouth. Meanwhile Bonny was giving them the benefit of his train of reasoning. His mouth was wide open, and his eyes very bright, and his forehead a field of perplexity.

"They's all agrubbing in the house," he reflected; "and they ain't been and offered me a bit to-day. There's ever so many more on the tree; and they locked up the scullery cupboard; and one on 'em called me a little warmint; and they tuck the key out of the beertap."

With all these wrongs upward, he stretched forth his hand, and pretty Cecil trembled for her shilling; shillings being very scarce with her. But the boy, without quite having touched the apple, drew back his hand; and that withdrawal perhaps was the turning-point of his life.

"He gived me all this," he said, looking at his sleeve; "and all on 'em stitched it up for me; and they lets me go in and out without watching; and twice I'se been out with him shutting! I 'ont, I 'ont. And them coorse red apples seldom be worth ating of."

Sturdily he arose, and gave a kick at one of the posts of the apple-tree, and set off for the gate as hard as he could go, while the virtuous vein should be uppermost.

"What a darling of honour!" cried Cecil Hales, jumping after him. "A Bayard, a Cato, an Aristides! He shall have his apple, and he shall have sixpence; and unlimited faith for ever. Bonny, come back. Here's your apple for you, and sixpence; and what would you like to have best in all the world now?"

"To go out shutting with the master, miss."

"You shall do it; I will speak to papa myself. If you please, Miss Madge, pay up your shilling. Now come back, Bonny; your master wants you."

"You are a little too late for your errand, I fear," answered Margaret, pulling her purse out; "while you were pursuing this boy, I heard the sound of a grand arrival."

"So much the better!" cried Cecil, who (like her mother) always made the best of things. "Papa has been teasing his gun for an hour. Bonny, run back, and keep old Shot quiet. He will break his chain, by the noise he makes. You are as bad as he is; and you both shall go."

The rector—of all men the most hospitable, though himself so sober in the morning—revived Captain Chapman, or at least refreshed him, with brandy and bitters, after that long ride. And keenly heeding all hindrance, in his own hurry to be starting, he thought it a very bad sign for poor Alice, that Stephen received no comfort from one, nor two, nor even three, large glasses.

At length they set forth, with a sickly sun shrinking back from the promise of the morning, and a vaporous glisten in the white south-east, looking as watery as the sea. "I told you so, Steenie," said the parson, who knew every sign of the weather among these hills; "we ought to have started two hours sooner. If

ever we had wet jackets in our life, we shall have them to-day, bold captain."

"It will bring in the snipes," said the captain, bravely. "We are not the sort of men, I take it, to heed a little sprinkle. Tom, have you got my bladder-coat?"

"All right, your honour," his keeper replied; and "See-ho!" cried Bonny, while the dogs were ranging.

"Where, where, where?" asked the captain dancing in a breathless flurry round a tuft of heath. "I can't see him; where is he, boy?"

"Poke her up, boy," said the rector; "surely you would not shoot the poor thing on her form!"

"Let him sit till I see him," cried the captain, cocking both his barrels; "now I am ready. Where the devil is he?"

"She can't run away," answered Bonny, "because your honour's heel be on her whiskers. Ah, there her gooth! Quick, your honour!"

And go she did in spite of his honour, and both the loads he sent after her; while the rector laughed so at the captain's plight, that it was quite impossible for him to shoot. The keeper also put on an experienced grin, while Bonny flung open all the cavern of his mouth,

"Run after him, boy! Look alive!" cried the captain. "I defy him to go more than fifty yards. You must all have seen how I peppered him."

"Ay, and salted her too, I believe," said the parson: "look along the barrel of my gun, and you will see the salt still on her tail, Steenie?"

As he pointed they all saw the gallant hare at a leisurely canter crossing the valley, some quarter of a mile below them.

"What!" cried the rector; "did you see that jump? What can there be to jump over there?" For puss had made a long bound from bank to bank, at a place where they could not see the bottom.

"Water, if 'e plaize, sir," answered Bonny; "a girt strame of water comed down that hollow, all of a sudden this mornint; and it hath been growing stronger ever since."

"Good God!" exclaimed Mr. Hales, dropping his gun. "What is the water like, boy?"

"I never seed no water like it afore. As black as what I does your boots with, sir; but as clear—you can see every stone in it."

"Then the Lord have mercy on this poor parish; and especially to the old house of Lorraine! For the Woeburn has broken out again."

"Why, rector, you seem in a very great fright," said Captain Chapman, recovering slowly from his sad discomfiture. "What is the matter about this water? Some absurd old superstition—is not it?"

"Superstition or not," Mr. Hales answered shortly, "I must leave you to shoot by yourself, Captain Chapman. I could not fire another shot to-day. It is more than three hundred and fifty years since this water of death was seen. In my church you may read what happened then. And not only that, but according to tradition, its course runs directly through our village, and even through my garden. My people know nothing about it yet. It may burst upon them quite suddenly. There are many obstructions, no doubt, in its course, and many hollow places to fill up. But before many hours it will reach us. As a question of prudence, I must hasten home. Shot, come to heel this moment!"

"You are right," said the captain; "I shall do the same. Your hospitable board will excuse me to-night. I would much rather not leap the Woeburn in the dark."

With the instinct of a man of the world, he perceived that the rector, under this depression,

would prefer to have no guest. Moreover, the clouds were gathering with dark menace over the hill-tops; and he was not the man—if such man there be—to find pleasure in a wet day's shooting.

"No horse has ever yet crossed the Woeburn," Mr. Hales replied, as they all turned homeward across the shoulder of the hill; "at least, if the legends about that are true. Though a hare may have leaped it to-day, to-morrow no horse will either swim or leap it."

"Bless my heart! does it rise like that? The sooner we get out of its way, the better. What a pest it will be to you, rector! Why, you never will be able to come to the meet, and our opening day is next Tuesday."

"Steenie," cried the rector, imbibing hope, "it has not struck me in that light before. But it scarcely could ever be the will of the Lord to cut off a parson from his own pack!"

"Oh, don't walk so fast!" shouted Captain Chapman; "one's neck might be broken down a hill like this. Tom, let me lean on your shoulder. Boy, I'll give you sixpence to carry my gun. Tom, take the flints out, that he mayn't shoot me. Here, Uncle Struan, just sit down a minute; a minute can't make any difference, you know."

"That is true," said the rector, who was also out of breath. "Bonny, how far was the black water come? You seem to know all about it."

"Plaize, sir, it seem to be coming down a hill; and the longer I looked, the more water was acoming."

"You little nincompoop! had it passed your own door yet—your hole, or your cave, or whatever you call it?"

"Plaize, sir, it worn't a runnin' towards I at all. It wor makin' a hole in the ground and kickin' a splash up in a fuzzy corner."

"My poor boy, its course is not far from your door; it may be in among your goods, and have drowned your jackass and all, by this time."

Like an arrow from a bow, away went Bonny down the headlong hill, having cast down the captain's gun, and pulled off his red coat to run the faster. The three men left behind clapped their hands to their sides and roared with laughter; at such a pace went the white buckskin breeches, through bramble, gorse, heather, over rock, sod, and chalk. "What a grand flying shot!" cried the keeper.

"Where the treasure is, there will the heart

be," said the rector, as soon as he could speak. "I would give a month's tithes for a good day's rout among that boy's accumulations. He has got the most wonderful things, they say; and he keeps them on shelves, like a temple of idols. What will he do when he gets too big to go in at his own doorway? I am feeding him up with a view to that; and so are my three daughters."

"He must be a thorough young thief," said the captain. "In any other parish he would be in prison. I scarcely know which is the softer 'Beak'—as we are called—you, or Sir Roland."

"Tom," cried the rector, "run on before us; you are young and active. Inquire where old Nanny Stilgoe lives, at the head of the village, and tell her that the flood is coming upon her; and help her to move her things, poor old soul, if she will let you help her. Tell her I sent you, and perhaps she will, although she is very hard to deal with. She has long been foretelling this break of the bourne; but the prophets are always the last to set their own affairs in order."

The keeper touched his hat, and set off. He always attended to the parson's orders more

than his own master's. And Mr. Hales saw from the captain's face that he had ordered things too freely.

"Steenie, I beg your pardon," he said; "I forgot for the moment that I should have asked you before I despatched your man like that. But I did it for your own good, because we need no longer hurry."

"Rector, I am infinitely obleeged to you. To order those men is so fatiguing. I always want some one to do it for me. And now we may go down the hill, I suppose, without snapping all our knee-caps. To go up a hill fast is a very bad thing; but to go down fast is a great deal worse, because you think you can do it."

"My dear fellow, you may take your time. I will not walk you off your legs, as that wicked niece of mine did. How are you getting on there now?"

"Well, that is a delicate question, rector. You know what ladies are, you know. But I do not see any reason to despair of calling you 'uncle,' in earnest."

"Have you brought the old lady over to your side? You are sure to be right when that is done."

"She has been on my side all along, for the sake of the land. Ah, how good it is!"

"And nobody else in the field, that we know of. Then Lallie can't hold out so very much longer. Lord bless me! do you see that black line yonder?"

"To be sure! Why it seems to be moving onward, like a great snake crawling. And it has a white head. What a wonderful thing!"

"It is our first view of the Woeburn. Would to heaven that it were our last one! The black is the water, and the white, I suppose, is the chalky scum swept before it. It is following the old track, as lava does. It will cross the Coombe road in about five minutes. If you want to get home, you must be quick to horse. Never mind the rain: let us run down the hill—or just stop one half-minute."

They were sitting in the shelter of a chalky rock, with the sullen storm rising from the south behind them, and the drops already pattering. On the right hand and on the left, brown ridges, furzy rises, and heathery scollops overhanging slidden rubble, and the steep zigzags of the sheep, and the rounding away into nothing of the hill-tops,—all of these were fading into the slaty blue of the rain-cloud.

Before them spread for leagues and leagues, clear, and soft, and smiling still, the autumnal beauty of the wealdland. Tufting hamlets here and there, with darker foliage round them, elbows of some distant lane unconsciously prominent, swathes of colour laid on broadly where the crops were all alike; some bold tree of many ages standing on its right to stand; and grey church-towers, far asunder, landmarks of a longer view; in the fading distance many things we cannot yet make out; but hope them to be good and beauteous, calm, and large with human life.

This noble view expanded always the great heart of the rector; and he never failed to point out clearly the boundary-line of his parish. He could scarcely make up his mind to miss that opportunity, even now; and was just beginning with a distant furze-rick, far to the westward under Chancton Ring, when Chapman, having heard it at least seven times, cut him short rather briskly.

"You are forgetting one thing, my dear sir. Your parish is being cut in two, while you are dwelling on the boundaries."

"Steenie, you are right. I had no idea that you had so much sense, my boy You see how

the ditches stand all full of water, so as to confuse me. A guinea for the first at the rectory gate! You ought to be handicapped. You call yourself twenty years younger, don't you?"

"Here's the guinea!" cried Chapman, as the parson set off; "two if you like; only let me come down this confounded hill considerately."

Mr. Hales found nothing yet amiss with his own premises; some people had come to borrow shovels, and wheeling-planks, and suchlike; but the garden looked so fair and dry, with its pleasant slope to the east, that the master laughed at his own terrors; until he looked into the covered well, the never-failing black-diamond water, down below the tool-house. Here a great cone rose in the middle of the well, like a plume of black ostrich; and the place was alive with hollow noises.

"Dig the celery!" cried the rector. "Every man and boy, come here. I won't have my celery washed away, nor my drumhead savoys, nor my ragged Jack. Girls, come out, every one of you. There is not a moment to lose, I tell you. I never had finer stuff in all my life; and I won't have it all washed away, I tell you. Here you heavy-breeched Dick, what the dickens are

you gaping at? I shan't get a thing done before dark, at this rate. Out of my way, every one of you. If you can't stir your stumps, I can."

With less avail, like consternation seized every family in West Lorraine. A river, of miraculous birth and power, was sweeping down upon all of them. There would never be any dry land any more; all the wise old women had said so. Everybody expected to see black water bubbling up under his bed that night.

Meanwhile this beautiful and grand issue of the gathered hill-springs moved on its way majestically, obeying the laws it was born of. The gale of the previous night had unsealed the chamber of great waters, forcing the needful air into the duct, and opening vaults that stored the rainfall of a hundred hills and vales. Through such a "bower of stalactite, such limpid realms and lakes enlock'd in caves," Cyrene led her weeping son—

> "Where all the rivers of the world he found,
> In separate channels gliding underground."

And now, as this cold resistless flood calmly reclaimed its ancient channel, swallowed up Nanny Stilgoe's well, and cut off the rector from his own church; as if to encounter its

legendary bane, a poor young fellow, depressed, and shattered, feeble, and wan, and heavy-hearted, was dragging his reluctant steps up the valley of the Adur. Left on the naked rocks of Spain, conquered, plundered, and half starved, Hilary Lorraine had fallen, with the usual reaction of a sanguine temperament, into low spirits and disordered health. So that when he at last made his way to Corunna, and found no British agent there, nor any one to draw supplies from, nothing but the pride of his family kept him from writing to the Count of Zamora. Of writing to England there was no chance. All communication ran through the channels of the distant and victorious army. So that he thought himself very lucky (in the present state of his health and fortunes), when the captain of an oil-ship bound for London, having lost three hands on the outward voyage, allowed him to work his passage. The fare of a landsman in feeble health was worth perhaps more than his services; but the captain was a kind-hearted man, and perceived (though he knew not who Hilary was) that he had that very common thing in those days, a "gent under a cloud" to deal with. And the gale, which had opened the Woeburn, shortened Hilary's track

towards it, by forcing his ship to run for refuge into Shoreham harbour.

"How shall I go home? What shall I say? Disgraced, degraded, and broken down, a stain upon my name and race, I am not fit to enter our old doors. What will my father say to me? And proud Alice—what will her thoughts be?"

With steps growing slower at each weary drag, he crossed the bridge of Bramber, and passed beneath the ivied towers of the rivals of his ancestors, and then avoiding Steyning town, he turned up the valley of West Lorraine. And the rain which had come on at middle-day, and soaked his sailor's slops long ago, now took him on the flank judiciously. And his heart was so low, that he received it all without talking either to himself or it.

"I will go to the rectory first," he thought; "Uncle Struan is violent, but he is warm. And though he has three children of his own, he loves me much more than my father does."

With this resolution, he turned on the right down a lane that came out by the rectory. The lane broke off suddenly into black water; and a tall, robust man stood in the twilight, with a heavy spade over his shoulder. And Hilary Lorraine went up to him.

"No, no, my man; not a penny to spare!" said the rector in anticipation; "we have a great deal too much to do with our own poor, and with this new trouble especially. The times are hard—yes, they always are; I never knew them otherwise. But an honest man always can get good work. Or go and fight for your country, like a man. But we can't have any vagrants in my parish."

"I have fought for my country, Uncle Struan; and this is all that has come of it."

"Good God, Hilary!" cried the rector; and for a long time he found nothing better to say.

"Yes, Uncle Struan, don't you understand? Every one must have his ups and downs. I am having a long spell of downs just now."

"My dear boy, my dear boy, whatever have you done?"

"Do you mean to throw me over, Uncle Struan, as the rest of the world has beautifully done? Everything seems to be upset. What is the meaning of this broad, black stream?"

"Come into my study, and tell me all. I can let you in without sight of your aunt. The shock would be too great for her."

Hilary followed, without a word. Mr. Hales led him in at the window, and warmed him, and

covered him with his own dressing-gown, and watched him slowly recovering.

"Never mind the tar on your hands; it is an honest smell," he said; "my poor boy, my poor boy, what you must have been through!"

"Whatever has happened to me," answered Hilary, spreading his thin hands to the fire, "has been all of my own doing, Uncle Struan."

"You shall have a cordial; and you shall tell me all. There, I have bolted the door. I am your parson, as well as your uncle. All you say will be sacred with me. And I am sure you have done no great harm after all. We shall see what your dear aunt thinks of it."

Then Hilary, sipping a little rum-and-water, wandered through his story; not telling it brightly, as once he might have done, but hiding nothing consciously.

"Do you mean to tell me there is nothing worse than that?" asked the rector, with a sigh of great relief.

"There is nothing worse, uncle. How could it be worse?"

"And they turned you out of the army for that! How thankful I am for belonging to the Church! You are simply a martyred hero."

"Yes, they turned me out of the army for

that. How could they help it?" Reasoning thus, he met his uncle's look of pity, and it was too much for him. He did what many a far greater man, and braver hero has done, and will do, when the soul is moving. He burst into a hot flood of tears.

CHAPTER VII.

GOING DOWN THE HILL.

SIR ROLAND LORRAINE was almost as free from superstition as need be. To be wholly quit of that romantic element is a disadvantage still; and excepts a neighbour even now from the general neighbourly sympathy. Threescore years ago, of course, that prejudice was threefold.

The swing of British judgment mainly takes magnetic repulse from whatever the French are rushing after. When they are Republican, all of us rally for throne and Constitution. When they have a Parliament, we want none. When they are pressed under empire, we are apt to be glad that it serves them right. We know them to be brave and good, lovers of honour, and sensitive; but we cannot get over the line between us and them—and the rest of the world, perhaps.

Whatever might be said or reasoned, for or

against the whole of such things, Sir Roland had long made up his mind to be moderate and neutral. He liked everybody to speak his best (according to self-opinion), and he liked to keep out of the way of them all, and relapse into the wiser ages. He claimed his own power to think for himself, as well as the mere right of doing so. And therefore he long had been "heterodox" to earnest, right-minded people.

Never the more, however, could he shake himself free from the inborn might of hereditary impress. The traditions of his house and race had still some power over him, a power increased by long seclusion, and the love of hearth and home. Therefore, when Trotman was cut off, on his way for his weekly paper, by a great black gliding flood, and aghast ran up the Coombe to tell it—Sir Roland, while he smiled, felt strange misgivings creeping coldly.

Alice, a sweet and noble maiden, on the tender verge of womanhood, came to her father's side, and led him back to his favourite book-room. She saw that he was at the point of trembling; although he could still command his nerves, unless he began to think of them. Dissembling her sense of all this, she sat by the fire, and waited for him.

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"My darling, we have had a very happy time," he began at last to say to her; "you and I, for many years, suiting one another."

"To be sure we have, father. And I mean to go on, suiting you, for many more years yet."

Her father saw by the firelight the sadness in her eyes; and he put some gaiety into his own, or tried.

"Lallie, you have brighter things before you —a house of your own, and society, and the grand world, and great shining."

"Excellent things, no doubt, my father; but not to be compared with you and home. Have I done anything to vex you, that you talk like this to me?"

"Let me see. Come here and show me. There are few things I enjoy so much as being vexed by you."

"There, papa, you are in a hurry to have your usual laugh at me. You shall have no material now. 'I knows what is right, and I means to do it'—as the man said to me at the turnpike-gate, when he made me pay twice over. Consider yourself, my darling father, saddled for all your life with me."

Sir Roland loved his daughter's quick bright turns of love, and filial passion, when

her heart was really moved. A thousand complex moods and longings played around or pierced her then; yet all controlled, or at least concealed, by an English lady's quietude. Alice was so like himself, that he always knew what she would think; and he tried his best to follow the zigzag flash of feminine feeling.

"My dear child," he said at last: "something has been too much for you. Perhaps that foolish fellow's story of this mysterious water. A gross exaggeration, doubtless. The finny tribe sticking fast by the gills in the nest of the wood-pigeon. Marry come up! Let us see these wonders. The moon is at the full to-night; and I hear no rain on the windows now. Go and fetch my crabstick, darling."

"Oh, may I come with you, papa? Do say yes. I shall lie awake all night, unless I go. The moon is sure to clear the storm off; and I will wrap up so thoroughly."

"But you cannot wrap up your feet, dear child; and the roads are continually flooded now."

"Not on the chalk, papa; never on the chalk, except in the very hollow places. Besides, I will put on my new French clogs. They can't be much less than six inches thick.

I shall stand among the deluge high enough for the fish to build their nests on me."

"Daughter of folly, and no child of mine, go and put your clogs on. We will go out at the eastern door, to arouse no curiosity."

As the master and his daughter passed beneath the astrologer's tower, and left the house by his private entrance, they could not help thinking of the good old prince, and his kind anxiety about them. To the best of their knowledge, the wise Agasicles had never heard of the Woeburn; or perhaps his mind had been so much engrossed with the comet that he took no heed of it. And even in his time, this strange river was legendary as the Hydaspes.

After the heavy and tempestuous rain, the night was fair, as it generally is, even in the worst of weather, when the full moon rises. The long-chined hill, with its level outline stretching towards the south of east, afforded play for the glancing light of a watery and laborious moon. Long shadows, laid in dusky bars, or cast in heavy masses where the hollow land prevailed for them, and misty columns hovering and harbouring over tree-clumps, and gleams of quiet light pursuing avenues of opening—all, of these, at every step of deep

descent, appeared to flicker like a great flag waving.

"What a very lovely night! How beautifully the clouds lie!" cried Alice, being apt to kindle rashly into poetry: "they softly put themselves in rows, and then they float towards the moon, and catch the silver of her smile—oh, why do they do that, papa?"

"Because the wind is west, my dear. Take care; you are on a great flint, I fear. You are always cutting your boots out."

"No, papa, no. I have got you this time. That shows how much you attend to me. I have got my great French clogs on."

"Then how very unsafe to be looking at the moon! Lean on me steadily, if you must do that. The hill is slippery with slime on the chalk. You will skate away to the bottom, and leave me mourning."

"Oh, how I should love to skate, if ladies ever could do such a thing! I can slide very nicely, as you know, papa. Don't you think, after all this rain, we are sure to have a nice cold winter?"

"Who can tell, Lallie? I only hope not. You children, with your quick circulation, active limbs, and vigorous lungs, are always longing

for frost and snow. But when they come, you get tired of them, within a week at the utmost. But in your selfish spring of life, you forget all the miseries of the poor and old, or even young folk who are poor, and the children starving everywhere. And the price of all food is now most alarming."

"I am sure I meant no harm," said Alice; "one cannot always think of everything. Papa, do you know that you have lately taken to be very hard upon me?"

"Well now, everybody says that of me," Sir Roland answered, thoughtfully; "I scarcely dreamed that my fault was that. But out of many mouths I am convicted. Struan Hales says it; and so does my mother. Hilary seemed to imply it also, at the time when he last was heard of. Mine own household, Trotman, Mrs. Pipkins, and that charitable Mrs. Merryjack, have combined to take the same view of me. There must be truth in it. I cannot make head against such a cloud of witnesses. And now Alice joins them. What more do I want? I must revise my opinion of myself, and confess that I am a hard-hearted man."

This question Sir Roland debated with

himself, in a manner which had long been growing upon him, in the gathering love of solitude. Being by nature a man with a most extraordinary love of justice, he found it hard (as such rare men do) to be perfectly sure about anything. He always desired to look at a subject from every imaginable outside view, receding (like a lark in the clouds) from groundling consideration, yet frankly open (like a woodcock roasting) to anything good put under him. Nobody knew him; but he did his best, when he thought of that matter, to know himself.

Now, his daughter allowed him to follow out his meditation quietly; and then she said, as they went down the hill, warily heeding each other's steps—

"Papa, I beg you particularly to pay no attention whatever to your own opinion, or any other opinion in the world, except perhaps, at least, perhaps——"

"Perhaps that of Alice."

"Quite so, papa. About my own affairs my opinion is of no value: but about yours, and the family in general, it is really—something."

"Wisest of our race, and bravest, you are rushing into the water, darling—stop; you have

forgotten what we came for. We came to see the Woeburn, and here it is!"

"Is this it? And yesterday I walked across this very place! Oh, what a strange black river!"

As Alice drew suddenly back and shuddered, Sir Roland Lorraine threw his left arm round her, without a word, and looked at her. The light of the full moon fell on her face, through a cleft of jagged margins, and the shadow of a branch, that had lost its leaves, lay on her breast, and darkened it.

"Why, Lallie, you seem to be quite frightened," her father said, after waiting long; "look up at me, and tell me, dear."

"No, I am not at all frightened, papa, but perhaps I am a little out of spirits."

"Why?" asked Sir Roland; "you surely do not pay heed to old rhymes and silly legends. I call this a fine and very lively water. I only wish it were always here."

"Oh, papa, don't say that, I implore you. And I felt you shiver when you saw it first. You know what it means for our family,—loss of life once, loss of property twice, and the third time the loss of honour,—and with that, of course, our extinction."

"You little goose, none can lose their honour without dishonourable acts. Come, Miss Cassandra; of the present Lorraines—a very narrow residue—who is to be distinguished thus?"

"Father, you know so much more than I do; but I thought that many people were disgraced, without having ever deserved it."

"Disgraced, my darling; but not dishonoured. What could disgrace ever be to us?—a thing that comes and goes, according to the fickle seasons—a result of the petty human weather, as this melancholy water is of the larger influence."

"Papa, then you own that it is melancholy. That was just what I wanted you to do. You always take things so differently from everybody else, that I began to think you would look upon this as a happy outburst of a desirable watering-water."

"Well done, Lallie! The command of language is an admirable gift. But the want of it leads to still finer issues. This watering-water seems inclined to go on for a long time watering."

"Of course, it must go flowing, flowing, until its time is over."

"Lallie, you have, among many other gifts, a decided turn for epigram. You scarcely could have described more tersely the tendencies of water. I firmly believe that this stream will go on flowing and flowing, until it quite stops."

"Papa, you are a great deal too bad. You must perceive that you are so, even by the moonlight. I say the most sensible things ever thought of, and out of them you make nonsense. Now let me have my turn. So please you, have you thought of bridges? How is our butcher to come, or our miller, our letters, or even our worthy beggars? We are shut off in front. Without building a boat, can I ever hear even Uncle Struan preach? Hark! I hear something like him."

"You frivolous Lallie! you are too bad. I cannot permit such views of things."

"Of course, papa, I never meant that. Only please to listen."

The dark and deep stream, which now had grown to a width of some twelve yards perhaps, was gliding swiftly, but without a murmur, towards the broad and watery moon. On the right-hand side, steep scars of chalk, shedding gleams of white rays, made the hollow places

darker; while on the other side, furzy tummocks, patches of briar, and tufted fallows spread the many-pointed light among their shadows justly.

"Please to listen," again said Alice, shrinking from her father, lest she might be felt to tremble. "What a plaintive, thrilling sound! It must be a good banshee, I am sure; a banshee that knows how good we are, and protests against our extinction. There it is again—and there seems to be another wail inside of it."

"A Chinese puzzle of noises, Lallie, and none of them very musical. Your ears are keener than mine, of course; but, being extinct of romance, I should say that I heard a donkey braying."

"Papa, now! papa, if it comes to that—and I said it was like Uncle Struan's voice! But I beg his pardon, quite down on my knees, if you think that it can be a donkey."

"I am saved all the trouble of thinking about it. There he is, looking hard at us!"

"Oh no, papa, he is not looking hard at us. He is looking most softly and sadly. What a darling donkey, and his nose is like a snowdrop!"

Clearly in the moonlight shone, on the opposite bank of the Woeburn, the nose of Jack the donkey. His wailings had been coming long, and his supplications rising; he was cut off from his home, and fodder, and wholly beloved Bonny. And the wail inside a wail—as Alice had described it—was the sound of the poor boy's woe, responsive to the forlorn appeal of Jack. On the brink of the cruel dividing water they must have been for a long time striding up and down, over against each other, stretching fond noses vainly forward, and outvying one another in the luxury of poetic woe.

"Don't say a word, papa," whispered Alice; "the boy cannot see us here behind this bush, and we can see him beautifully in the moonlight. I want to know what he will do, so much."

"I don't see what he can do except howl," Sir Roland answered quietly: "and certainly he seems to possess remarkable powers in that way."

"Bo-hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo!" wept Bonny in confirmation of this opinion; and "eke-haw, eke-haw," from a nose of copious pathos, formed the elegiac refrain. Then having ex-

hausted the well of weeping, the boy became fitter for reasoning. He wiped his eyes with his scarlet sleeves, and stretched forth his arms reproachfully.

"Oh Jack, Jack, Jack, whatever have I done to you? All the crumb of the loaf you had, and the half of the very last orchard I run, and the prime of old Nanny's short-horns, and if you wasn't pleased, you might a' said so all the morning, Jack. There's none in all the world as knoweth what you and I be, but one another. And there's none as careth for either on us, only you and me, Jack. Don't 'ee, Jack, don't 'ee go and run away. If 'ee do, I'll give the thieves all as we've collected, and the rogues as calls us two waggabones."

"My poor boy," said Sir Roland Lorraine, suddenly parting the bush between them, in fear of another sad boo-hoo—for Bonny had stirred his own depths, so that he was quite ready to start again—"my poor boy, you seem to be very unhappy about your donkey."

Bonny made answer to never a word. This woe belonged only to Jack and himself. They could never think of being meddled with.

"Bonny," said Alice, in her soft sweet voice, and kindly touching him, as he turned away,

"do you wish to know how to recover your Jack? Would you go a long way to get him back again?"

"To the outermost end of the world, Miss, if the whole of the way wor fuzz-bush. Miles and miles us have gone a'ready."

"You need not go quite to the end of the world. Instead of going up and down these banks, keep steadily up the water. In about a mile you will come to its head, if what I have heard of it is true; then keep well above it, and round the hill, and you will meet the white-nosed donkey."

"Hee-haw!" said Jack, from the opposite bank, not without a whisk of tail. Then the boy, without a word of thanks, by reason of incredulity, whistled a quick reply, and set off to test this doubtful theory.

"Observe now the bliss of possessing a donkey," Sir Roland began to meditate; "I am not at all skilful in asses, whether golden, or leaden, or wooden, or even as described by Œlian. But the contempt to which they are born, proves to my mind that they do not deserve it; or otherwise how would they get it? My sentence is clumsy. My idea—if there be one—has not managed to express

itself. I hear the white-nosed donkey in the distance braying at me, with an overpowering echo of contempt. I am unequal to this contest. Let me withdraw to my book-room."

"Indeed, papa, you will do nothing of the sort. You are always withdrawing to your book-room; and even I must not come in; and what good ever comes of it? You must, if you please, make up your mind to meet things very differently. And only think how long it is since we have heard of poor Hilary! There are troubles coming, overwhelming troubles, on all with the name or the love of Lorraine, as sure as I stand, my dear father, before you."

"Then I pray you to stand behind me, Alice. What an impulsive child it is! And the moonlight, my darling, has had some effect, as it always has, wonderfully on such girls. You have worked yourself up, Lallie; I can see it. My pet, I must watch you carefully."

"What a mistake you make, papa! I never do anything of the sort. You seem to regard me as anybody's child, to be reasoned with, out of a window. I may be supposed to say foolish things, and to imagine all sorts of nonsense; and, of course, I cannot reason, because it is

not born with us. And then, when I try, I have no chance whatever; though perfect justice is my aim; and who comes lingering after me?"

"Your excellent father," Sir Roland answered, kissing away his child's excitement. "Your loving father does all this, my pet, and brings you quite home to stern reason. And now he will take you home to your home. You have caught the sad spirit of the donkey-petling; you long to go up and down this water, with some one to bewail you on the other side."

"Yes, papa, so I do. You are so clever! But I think I should go down and up, papa; if the quadruped you are thinking of went up and down."

"Now Lallie!" he said; and he said no more. For he knew that she hinted at Stephen Chapman, and wanted to fight her own battle against him, now that she was in the humour. The father was ready to put off the conflict—as all good fathers must be—and he led his dear child up the hill, or let her lead him, peacefully.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLEDGE OF A LIFE.

THREE days of gloom and storm ensued upon the outbreak of the water; while the old house at the head of the Coombe in happy ignorance looked down upon its hereditary foe. But dark forebodings and fine old stories agitated the loyal hearts of the domestics of the upper conclave,—that ancient butler Onesimus Binns, Mrs. Pipkins, and Mrs. Merryjack. With such uneasy feelings prevalent in the higher circle, nothing short of terror, or even panic, could be expected among the inferior dignitaries, now headed by John Trotman. This young man had long shown himself so ambitious and aggressive, even "cockroaching," as Mrs. Merryjack said, "on the most sacred rights of his betters," that the latter had really but one course left—to withdraw to their upper room, and exclude "all as didn't know how to behave theirselves."

Of these unhappily there were too many; and they seemed to enjoy themselves more freely after their degradation. For Trotman (though rapid of temper, perhaps, and given to prompt movements of the foot) was not at all bad (when allowed his own way), and never kicked anybody who offered to be kicked. So with his dictatorship firmly established in the lesser lower regions, he became the most affable of mankind, and read all the crimes of the county to the maids, and drew forth long sighs of delicious horror, that his own brave self might console them. And now, when they heard of the sombre Woeburn, with its dismal legend, enhanced by ghastly utterances of ancient Nanny Stilgoe, and tidings brought through wailing winds of most appalling spectres, the stoutest heart was agitated with mysterious terror. At the creak of a door or the flit of a shadow, the rustle of a dry leaf, or the waving of a window-blind, the hoot of an owl, or even the silent creep of gloomy evening—"My goodness, Mary Ann, what was that?" Or, "Polly, come closer, I hear something;" or, "Jane, do 'ee look behind the platescreen;" and then with one voice, "John, John, John, come down; that's a dear

man, John!" Such was the state of the general nerve, as proved by many a special appeal from kitchen, back-kitchen, and scullery, pantry, terrible cellar, or lonesome wash-house; and the best of everything was kept for John.

Even in the world of finer, feebler, and more foreign English; in dining-room, drawing-room, parlour, and book-room, and my lady's chamber, a mild uneasiness prevailed, and a sense of evil auspices. Lady Valeria, most of all, who carried conservatism into relapse, felt that troublous days were coming, and almost longed to depart in peace; or at any rate she said so. But with her keen mind, and legal insight, she was bound to perceive that the authorized version of the other world is democratic; as might be that of this world, if Christianity made Christians. Therefore her ladyship preferred to wait. Things might get better; and they could scarcely get worse. She had a good deal to see to and settle among things strictly visible, and she threatened everybody with her decease; but did not prepare to make it.

Sir Roland Lorraine, on the other hand, paid little heed, of his own accord, to superstitious vanities. He found a good many in-

stances, in classic, Persian, and Italian literature, of the outbreak of underground waters; and there it was always a god who caused it—either by chasing river-nymphs, or by showing the power of a horse's heels, or from benevolent motives, and a desire to water gardens. Therefore Sir Roland gathered hope. He had not invested his mind as yet in implicit faith in anything; but rather was inclined to be tolerant, and tentative, and diffident of his own opinions. And these not being particularly strong, self-assertive, or self-important, and not being founded on any rock, but held on the briefest building-lease, their owner, lease-holder, or tenant-at-will, was a very pleasant man to talk with.

That means, of course, when he could be got to talk. And less and less could he be got to talk, as the few people who had the key to his liking dropped off; and no others came. Never, even in his brightest days, had he been wont to sparkle, flash, or even glow, in converse. He simply had a soft large way of listening, and a small dry knack of so diverting serious thought, that genial minds went roving. But now his own mind had grown more and more accustomed to go a-roving;

and though, having never paid any attention to questions of science, or even to the weather (now gradually becoming one of them), he could not satisfy himself about the menacing appearance; in a very few hours he buried the portent in a still more portentous pile of books.

But Alice, though fond of reading and of meditating in her little way, was too full of youth and of healthy life, to retire into the classic ages of even our English language. Her delight was rather in the writers of the day, so many of whom were making themselves the writers of all future days—Coleridge, Wordsworth, Campbell, and above all others, the "Wizard of the North," whose lays of romance and legend were a spur that raised the clear spirit of Alice.

On the third day from the Woeburn's rise, she sat in her garden bower, absorbed in her favourite "Lady of the Lake." Her bower, though damp and mossy, and dishevelled by the storms of autumn, was still a pleasant place to rest in, when the view was clear and bright. The fairest view, however, now, and the most attractive study, were not of flower, and tree, and landscape, but of face and figure

—the face of Alice Lorraine, so gentle, pure, and rapt with poetic thought; and the perfect maiden form inspired by the roused nobility of the mind. The hair, in lines of flowing softness fallen back, disclosed the clear tranquillity of forehead, in contrast with the quick tremor of lip, and the warmth that tinted, now and then, the delicate moulding of bright young cheeks. And as the sweet face, more and more lit up with sequent thought, and bowed with the flitting homage of a reader, genial tears for dead and buried love, and grief, and gallantry arose, and glistened in dark grey eyes, and hung like the gem that quivers in the lashes of the sun-dew.

"Plaize, Miss Halice, my leddy desireth to see you, to wonst, if you plaize, Miss."

Thus spake the practical, and in appearance most unpoetical, Trotman, glancing at Alice, and then at her book, with more curiosity than he durst convey. "Please to say that I will be with her as soon as I can finish some important work," she answered, speedily quenching Trotman's hope of finding out what she was reading, so as to melt the housemaids therewith at night. "Well, she always were a rum un," he muttered in his disappointment,

as he returned to his own little room, which he always called his "study;" "the captain will have to stand on his head to please her, or I'm mistaken. Why, a body scarce dare look at her. Sooner him than me, say I; although she is such a booty. But the old un will give her her change, I hope."

Meanwhile the young lady (unloved of Trotman, because she held fast by old Mr. Binns) put aside, with a sigh, both the poem and her own poetic dreamings, and proved that her temper, however strong, was sweet and large and well controlled, by bridling her now closed lips from any peevish exclamation. She waited a little time, until the glow of her cheeks abated, and the sparkle of her eyes was tranquil, and then she put her pretty hat on (deep brown, trimmed with plumes of puce), and thinking no more of herself than that, set forth to encounter her grandmother.

By this time Alice Lorraine had grown, from a sensitive spirited girl, into a sensitive spirited woman. The things which she used to think and feel to be right, she was growing to know to be right; and the fleeting of doubt from her face was beginning to form the soft expression. That is to say—if it can be de-

scribed, and happily it never can be—goodwill, largeness of heart, rich mercy, sympathy, and quick tenderness combined with grace and refinement, towards the perfection of womanly countenance.

So, whatever there was to be done, this Alice was always quite ready to do it. She had not those outlets for her active moods which young ladies have at the present day, who find or form an unknown quantity of most pressing duties. "Oh no, I have no time to marry anybody," they exclaim in a breathless manner; "if I did, I must either neglect my district, or my natural history."

Poor Alice had neither district, duck-weed net, nor even microscope; and what was even worse, she had no holy priest to guide her thoughts, no texts to work in moss and sago, nor even any croquet. Whatever she did, she had to do without any rush of the feminine mind into masculine channels prepared for it; and even without any partnership of dear and good companions. So that the fight before her was to be fought out by herself alone.

This was the last quiet day of her life; the last day for thinking of little things; the last day of properly feeding her pets, her poultry,

and tame hares, and pigeons, self-important robins (perching upon their own impudence), and sweetly trustful turtle-doves, that have no dream of evil. She fed them all; and if it were not her last day of feeding them, it was the last time she could feed them happily, and without envying their minds.

This was that important work, which she was bound to attend to, before she could hurry to the side of her grandmother. That fine old lady always made a point of sending for Alice, whenever she knew her need—or rather, without knowing, needed the relief of a little explosion. Her dignity strictly barred this outlet towards those creatures of a lower creation, who had the bliss of serving her. To all such people she was most forbearing, in a large and liberal style; because it must be so impossible for them at all to understand her. And, for this courteous manner, every woman in the place disliked her. The men, however, having slower perceptions, thought that her ladyship was quite right. They could make allowance for her—that they could; and after all, if you come to think of it, the "femmel" race was most aggravating. So they listened to what all the women had to tell: and without

contradiction wisely let female opinion waste itself.

Lady Valeria Lorraine, though harassed and weakened by rheumatism and pain of the nerves (which she sternly attributed to the will of God and the weather), still sat as firmly erect as ever, and still exacted, by a glance alone, all those little attentions which she looked so worthy to receive. The further she became removed from the rising generation, the greater was the height of contempt from which she deigned to look down upon it. So that Alice used to say to her father sometimes, "I wonder whether I have any right to exist. Grandmamma seems to think it so impertinent of me." "One thing is certain," Sir Roland answered, with a quiet smile at his favourite; "and that is, that you cannot exist without impertinence, my dear."

This fine old lady was dressed with her usual taste and elaboration; no clumsy chits would she have to help her, during the three hours occupied, by what she termed, most truly, her "devotions." She wore a maroon-coloured velvet gown of the softest and richest fabric, trimmed, not too profusely, with exquisite point-lace; while her cap, of the same lace, with dove-

coloured ribbon, at the same time set off and was surpassed by the beauty of her snow-white hair. Among many other small crotchets, she held that brilliants did not suit a very old lady; and she wore no jewels, except a hoop of magnificent pearls with a turquoise setting, to preserve her ancient wedding-ring. And now, as her grandchild entered quietly, she was a little displeased at delay, and feigned to hear no entrance.

"Here I am, grandmamma, if you please," said Alice, after three most graceful curtseys, which she was always commanded to make, and made with much private amusement; "will you please to look round, grandmamma, and tell me what you want of me?"

"I could scarcely have dreamed," answered Lady Valeria, slowly turning towards her grandchild, and smiling with superior dignity, "that any member of our family would use the very words of the clown in the ring. But, perhaps, as I always try to think, you are more to be pitied than condemned. Partly through your own fault, and partly through peculiar circumstances, you have lost those advantages which a young lady of our house is entitled to. You have never been at Court; you have seen

no society; you have never even been in London!"

"Alas! it is all too true, grandmamma. But how often have you told me that I never must hope, in this degenerate age, to find any good model to imitate! And you have always discouraged me, by presenting yourself as the only one for me to follow."

"You are quite right," said the ancient lady, failing to observe the turn of thought, as Alice was certain that she would do, else scarcely would she have ventured it; "but, you do not make the most of even that advantage. You can read and write, perhaps better than you ought, or better than used to be thought at all needful; but you cannot come into a room, or make a tolerable curtsey; and you spend all your time with dogs, and poets, and barrows of manure, and little birds!"

"Now really, madam, you are too hard upon me. I may have had a barrow-load of poets; but more than a month ago, you gave orders that I was not to have one bit more of manure."

"Certainly I did, and high time it was. A young gentlewoman to dabble in worms, and stable-stuff, and filthiness! However, I did not

send for you to speak about such little matters. What I have to say is for your own good ; and I will trouble you not to be playing with your hands, but just to listen to me."

"I beg your pardon," said Alice, gently ; "I did not know I was moving my hands. I will listen, without doing that any more."

"Now, my dear child," began Lady Valeria, being softened by the dutiful manner and sweet submission of the girl ; "whatever we do is for your own good. You are not yet old enough to judge what things may profit, and what may hurt you. Even I, who had been brought up in a wholly superior manner, could not at your age have thought of anything. I was ready to be led by wiser people ; although I had seen a good deal of the world. And you, who have seen nothing, must be only too glad to do the same. You know quite well, what has long been settled, between your dear father and myself, about what is to be done with you."

"To be done with me!" exclaimed poor Alice, despite her resolve to hold her tongue. "To be done with me! As if I were just a bundle of rags, to be got rid of!"

"Prouder and handsomer girls than you," answered Lady Valeria, quietly—for she loved

to provoke her grandchild, partly because it was so hard to do—"have become bundles of rags, by indulging just such a temper as yours is. You will now have the goodness to listen to me, without any vulgar excitement. Your marriage with Captain Chapman has for a very long time been agreed upon. It is high time now to appoint the day. Sir Remnant Chapman has done me the honour of a visit upon that subject. He is certainly a man of the true old kind; though his birth is comparatively recent. I was pleased with him; and I have pledged myself to the marriage, within three months from this day."

"It cannot be! it shall not be! You may bury me, but not marry me. Who gave you the right to sell me? And who made me to be sold? You selfish, cold-hearted—no, I beg your pardon. I know not what I am saying."

"You may well fall away, child, and cower like that; when you have dared to use such dreadful words. No, you may come to yourself, as you please. I am not going to give you any volatile salts, or ring, and make a scene of it. That is just what you would like; and to be petted afterwards. I hope you have not hurt yourself, so much as you have hurt me

perhaps, by your violent want of self-control. I am not an old woman—as you were going to call me—but an elderly lady. And I have lived indeed to be too old, when any one descended from me has so little good blood in her as to call her grandmother an old woman!"

"I am very, very sorry," said Alice, with catches of breath, as she spoke, and afraid to trust herself yet to rise from the chair, into which she had fallen; "I used no such words, that I can remember. But I spoke very rudely, I must confess. I scarcely know what I am to do, when I hear such dreadful things; unless I bite my tongue off."

"I quite agree with you. And I believe it is the very best thing all young people can do. But I strive to make every allowance for you, because you have been so very badly brought up. Now come to this window, child, and look out. Tut, tut—tears indeed! What are young girls made of now? White sugar in a wet tea-cup. Now if the result of your violence allows you to see anything at all, perhaps you will tell me what that black line is, among the rough ground, at the bottom of the hill. To me it is perfectly clear, although I am such a very old woman."

"Why, of course, it is the Woeburn, madam. It has been there for three days."

"You know what it means; and you calmly tell me that!"

"I know that it means harm, of course. But I really could not help its coming. And it has not done any harm as yet."

"No, Alice, it waits its due time, of course. Three months is its time, I believe, for running, before it destroys the family. Your marriage affords the only chance of retrieving the fortunes of this house, so as to defy disasters. Three months, therefore, is the longest time to which we can possibly defer it. How many times have we weakly allowed you to slip out of any certain day. But now we have settled that you must be Mrs. Chapman by the 15th of January at the latest."

"Oh, grandmamma, to think that I ever should live to be called Mrs. Chapman."

"The name is a very good one, Alice, though it may not sound very romantic. But poor Sir Remnant, I fear, is unlikely to last for a great time longer. He seemed so bent, and his sight so bad, and requiring so much refreshment! And then, of course, you would be Lady Chapman, if you care about such trifles."

"It is a piteous prospect, madam. And I think Captain Chapman must be older than his father. You know the old picture, 'The Downhill of Life;' the excellent and affectionate couple, descending so nicely hand-in-hand. Well, I should illustrate that at once. I should have to lead my—no, I won't call him husband—but my tottering partner down the hill, whenever we came to see you and papa. Oh, that would be so interesting!"

"You silly child, you might do much worse than that. Lady de Lampnor has promised most kindly to see to your outfit in London. But I cannot talk of that at present. There, now you may go. I have told you all."

"Thank you, grandmamma. But, if you please, I have not told you all, nor half. It need not, however, take very long. It is just this. No power on earth shall ever compel me to marry Stephen Chapman; unless, indeed, it were so to happen——"

"You disobedient and defiant creature—unless what should happen?"

"Unless the existence, and even the honour, of the Lorraines required it. But of that I see no possibility at all. At present it seems to be nothing more than a small and ignominious

scheme. More and more I despise and dislike that heroic officer. I will not be sacrificed for nothing; and I have not the smallest intention of being the purchase-money for old acres."

"After that, I shall leave you to your father," answered Lady Valeria, growing tired. "It may amuse you to talk so largely, and perhaps for the moment relieves you. But your small self-will, and your childish fancies, cannot be always gratified. However, I will ask you one thing. If the honour, and even the life of Lorraine, can be shown to you to require it, will you sacrifice your noble self?"

"I will," answered Alice, with brave eyes flashing, and looking tall and noble. "If the honour of the Lorraines depends upon me, I will give myself and my life for it."

CHAPTER IX.

A HERO'S RETURN.

HILARY was so weak and weary, and so seriously ill, when at last he reached the rectory, that his uncle and aunt would not hear of his coming downstairs for a couple of days at least. They saw that his best chance of escaping some long and perhaps fatal malady was to be found in rest and quietude, nursing, and kindly feeding. And the worst of it was, that, whatever they did, they could not bring him to feed a quarter so kindly as he ought to do. The rector said, "Confound the fellow!" and Mrs. Hales shook her head, and cried "Poor dear!" as dish after dish, and dainty little plate, came out of his room untasted.

And now, on the morning of that same day on which Alice thus had pledged herself (being the third from her brother's arrival, of which she was wholly ignorant), the rector of West

Lorraine arose, and girded himself, and ate his breakfast with no small excitement. He had received a new clerical vestment of the loftiest symbolism, and he hoped to exhibit it at the head of a very long procession.

"About poor Hilary? What am I to do?" asked Mrs. Hales, coming into the lobby, to see her good husband array himself. "All sorts of things may happen while you are away."

"Now, Caroline, how can you ask such a question? Feed, feed, feed; that's the line of treatment. And above all things, lock up your medicine-chest. He wants no squills, or scammony, or even your patent electuary—of all things the most abominable; though I am most ungrateful to call it so—for I owe to it half my burial-fees. He wants no murderous doctor's stuff; he wants a good breakfast—that's what he wants."

"But, my dear, you forget," answered good Mrs. Hales, who kept a small wardrobe of bottles, and pills, gallipots, powders, and little square scales; "you are quite overlooking the state of his tongue. He has not eaten the size of my little finger. Why? Why, because of the fur on his tongue!"

"Bless the boy's tongue, and yours too!"

cried the rector. "I should not care twopence about his tongue, if he only used his teeth properly."

"Ah, Struan, Struan! those who have never known what ache or pain is, cannot hope to understand the system. I know exactly how to treat him—a course of gentle drastics first, and then three days of my electuary, and then cardamomum, exhibited with liquor potassy. Doctoring has always been in my dear mother's family; and when your time comes to be ill and weak, how often you will thank Providence!"

"I thank the Lord for all things," said the parson, who was often of a religious turn; "but I must be brought very low indeed, ere I thank Him for your electuary."

"Put on your new hunting-coat, my dear. There it hangs, and I know that you are dying to exhibit it. The vanity of men surpasses even the love of women. There, there! You never will learn how to put a coat on. Just come to the hall-chair, for me to pull it up. You are so unreasonably tall, that you never can get your coat up at the neck. Now, will you have it done, or will you go as you are, and look a regular figure in the saddle? You

call it a 'bottle-green!' I call it a green, without the bottle."

"Caroline, sometimes you are most provoking. It is not your nature; but you try to do it. The cloth is of quite an invisible green, as the man in London told me—manufactured on purpose for ecclesiastics; though hundreds of parsons, God knows, go after the hounds in the good old scarlet. If you say any more, I will order a scarlet, and keep West Grinstead in countenance. They always do it in the west of England. In invisible green, I am a hypocrite."

"Now, don't excite yourself, Struan, or you won't enjoy your opening day at all. And I am sure that the green is as bright as can be; and you look very well—very well indeed. Though I don't quite see how you can button it. Perhaps it is meant for a button-hook, or a leather thong over your stomach, dear."

"It is meant to fit me, Mrs. Hales; and it fits me to a nicety. It could not fit better; and it will be too easy, when we have had a few hard runs. Where are my daughters? They know a good fit; and they know how to put a thing on my shoulders. Carry, Madge, and Cecil, come to the rescue of your father. Your

father is baited, worse than any badger. Come all of you; don't stop a minute, or get perverted by your mother. Now, in simple truth, what do you say to this, my dears? Each speak her own opinion."

"It suits you most beautifully, papa."

"Papa, I think that I never saw you look a quarter so well before."

"My dear father, if there are any ladies, mamma will have reason to be jealous. But I fear that I see the back-seam starting."

"You clever little Cecil, I am afraid that it is. I feel a relief in my—ahem!—I mean an uncomfortable looseness in the chest. I told the fellow forty-eight inches at least. He has scamped the cloth, the London rascal! However, we can spare it from round the waist, as soon as our poor Cobble can see to it. But for to-day—ah yes, well thought of! My darling, go and get some of your green purse-silk. You are so handy. You can herring-bone it so as to last for the day at least. Your mother will show you how to do it. Madge, tell Bonny to run and tell Robert not to bring the mare yet for a quarter of an hour. Now, ladies, I am at your mercy."

"Now, papa dear," asked Cecil, as she

stitched away at the seam of her father's burly back; "if poor Cousin Hilary should get up and want to go out, what are we to do?"

"How can you even put such a question? Even for our opening day, I would not dream of leaving the house, if I thought that you could be so stupid as to let that poor boy out. I would not have him seen in the parish, and I would not have his own people see him, even for the brush of the Fox-coombe fox, who is older than the hills, they say, and no hound dare go near him. One of you must be always handy; and if he gets restless, turn the key on him. Nothing can be simpler."

With his bottle-green coat, now warranted to last (unless he overbuttoned it), the rector kissed his dear wife and daughters; and then universal good wishes, applauses, and kissings of hand, set him forth on his way, with a bright smile spread upon his healthy face.

"Now mind, we are left in charge," said Madge. "You are his doctor, of course, mamma; but we are to be his constables. I hope to goodness that he will eat by-and-by. It makes me miserable to see him. And the trouble we have had to keep the servants from knowing who he is, mamma!"

"My dear, your father has ordered it so. For my part, I cannot see why there should be so much mystery about it. But he always knows better than we do, of course."

"Surely, mamma," suggested Cecil, "it would be a dreadful shock to the family to receive poor Hilary in such a condition, just after the appearance of that horrid water. They would put the two things together, and believe it the beginning of great calamities."

"Now, my dear child," answered Mrs. Hales, who loved to speak a word in season; "let not us, who are Christians, hearken to such superstitious vanities. Trust in the Lord, and all will be well. He holdeth in the hollow of his hands the earth and all that therein is; yea, and the waters that be under the earth. Now run up, and see whether your poor cousin has eaten that morsel of anchovy toast. And tell him that I am going to prepare his draught; but he must not take the pills until half-past eleven."

"Oh, mamma dear, you'll drive him out of the house. Poor fellow, how I do pity him!"

Now Hilary certainly deserved this pity—not for his bodily ailments only, and the cruel fate which had placed him at the mercy of the

medicine-chest, but more especially for the low and feverish condition of his heart and mind. Brooding perpetually on his disgrace, and attributing to himself more blame than his folly and failure demanded, he lost the refreshment of dreamless sleep, which his jaded body called out for. No rest could he find in the comforting words of his uncle and aunt and cousins: he knew that they were meant for comfort, and such knowledge vexes; or at least it irritates a man, until the broader time of life, when things are taken as they are meant, and any good word is welcome.

He was not, however, so very far gone as to swallow his dear aunt's boluses. He allowed his pillow to take his pills; and his good-natured cousins let him swallow them, as much as a juggler swallows swords. "I can't take them while you are looking," he said; "when you come in again you will find them gone."

Now one of the girls—it was never known which, because all three denied it—stupidly let the sick cousin know that the master of the house was absent. Hilary paid no special heed at the moment when he heard it; but after a while he began to perceive (as behoved a blockaded soldier) that here was his chance for a

sally. And he told them so, after his gravy-beef and a raw egg beaten up with sherry.

"How cunning you are now!" said Cecil, who liked and admired him very deeply. "But you are not quite equal, Master Captain, to female ingenuity. The Spanish ladies must have taught you that, if half that I hear is true of them. Now you need not look so wretched, because I know nothing about them. Only this I know, that out of this house you are not allowed to go, without—oh, what do you call it? —a pass, or a watchword, or a countersign, or something or other from papa himself. So you may just as well lie down—or mamma will come up with a powder for you."

"The will of the Lord be done," said Hilary; "but, Cecil, you are getting very pretty, and you need not take away my breeches."

"I am sorry to do it, Cousin Hilary; but I know quite well what I am about. And none of your military ways of going on can mislead me as to your character. You want to be off. We are quite aware of it. You can scarcely put two feet to the ground."

"Oh dear, how many ought I to be able to put?".

"You know best—at least four, I should

hope. But you are not equal to argument. And we are all particularly ordered to keep you from what is too much for you. Now I shall take away these things — whatever they are called, I have no idea; but I do what I am told to do. And after this you will take that glass of the red wine, declared to be wonderful, and then you will shut both your eyes, if you please, till my father comes home from his hunting."

The lively girl departed with a bow of light defiance, carrying away her father's small clothes (which had been left for Hilary), and locking the door of his bedroom with a decisive turn of a heavy key. "Mother, you may go to sleep," she said, as she ran down into the drawing-room: "I defy him to go, if he were Jack Sheppard: he has got no breeches to go in."

"Cecil, you are almost too clever! How your father will laugh, to be sure!" And the excellent lady began her nap.

As the afternoon wore away, Hilary grew more and more impatient of his long confinement. Not only that he pined for the open air —as, of course, he must do, after living so long with the free sky for his canopy—but also that he felt most miserable at being so near the old house on the hill, yet doubtful of his reception

there. More than once he rang the bell; but the old nurse, who alone of the servants was allowed to enter, would do no more than scold or coax him, and quietly lock him in again. So at last he got out of bed, and feebly made his way to the window, and thence beheld, betwixt him and the grassy mounds of the churchyard, that swift black stream which had so surprised him on the night of his arrival.

Since then he had persuaded himself, or allowed others to persuade him, that the water had been a vision only of his weak and excited brain. But now he saw it clearly, calmly, and in a very few moments knew what it was, and of what dark import.

"How can I have let them keep me here?" he exclaimed, with indignation. "My father and sister must believe me dead, while I play at this miserable hide-and-seek. Perhaps they will think that I had better have been dead; but, at any rate, they shall know the truth."

With these words he took up his sailor-clothes, which the clever Cecil had overlooked, and which had been left in his room for fear of setting the servants talking; and he dressed himself as well as he could, and tried to look clean and tidy. But do what he might, he could

only cut a poor and sorry figure; and looking in the glass, he was frightened at his wan and worn appearance. Then, knowing the habits of the house, and wishing to avoid excitement, he waited until the two elder daughters were gone down the village for their gossip, and Cecil was seeing the potatoes dug, and Mrs. Hales sleeping over Fisher or Patrick, while the cook was just putting the dinner down; and then, without trying the door at all, he quietly descended from the window, with the help of a stack-pipe and a spurry pear-tree.

So feeble was he now, that this slight exertion made him turn faint, and sick, and giddy: and he was obliged to sit down and rest under a shrub, into which he had staggered. But after a while, he found himself getting a little better: and, pulling up one of the dahlia-stakes, to help himself along with, he made his way to the gate; and there being cut off from the proper road, followed the leave of the land and the water, along the valley upward.

Alice Lorraine had permitted herself not quite to lose her temper, but still to get a little worried by her grandmother's exhortations. Of all living beings, she felt herself to be one of the very most reasonable; and whenever she began

to doubt about it, she knew there was something wrong with her. Her favourite cure for this state of mind was a free and independent ride over the hills and far away. She hated to have a groom behind her, watching her, and perhaps criticizing the movements of her figure. But as it was scarcely the proper thing for Miss Lorraine to be scouring the country, like a yeoman's daughter, she always had to start with a trusty groom; but she generally managed to get rid of him.

And now, having vainly coaxed her father to come for a breezy canter, Alice set forth about four o'clock, for an hour of rapid air, to clear, invigorate, and enliven her. Whatever she did, or failed of doing (when her grandmother was too much for her), she always looked graceful, and bright, and kind. But she never looked better than when she was sitting, beautifully straight, on her favourite mare, skimming the sward of the hills; or bowing her head in some tangled covert. This day, she allowed the groom to chase her (like the black care that sits behind) until she had taken free burst of the hills, and longed to see things quietly. And then she sent him, in the kindest manner, to a very old woman at Lower Charlcton, to ask

whether she had been frightened; and, when he had turned the corner of a difficult plantation, Alice took her course for that which she had made up her mind to do.

According to the ancient stories, no fair-blooded creatures (such as man, or horse, cow, dog, or pigeon) would ever put lip to the accursed stream; whereas all foul things, pole-cats, foxes, fitches, badgers, ravens, and the like, were drawn by it, as by a loadstone, and made a feasting-place of it. So Alice resolved that her darling "Elfrida" should be compelled to pant with thirst, and then should have the fairest offer of the water of the Woeburn. And of this intent she was so full, that she paid no heed to the "dressing bell," clanging over the lonely hill, nor even to her pet mare's sense of dinner; but took a short cut of her own knowledge, down a lonely bostall, to the channel of new waters.

The stream had risen greatly even since the day before yesterday, and now in full volume swept on grandly towards the river Adur. Any one who might chance to see it for the first time, and without any impression, or even idea concerning it, could scarcely fail to observe how it differed from ordinary waters. Not only

through its pellucid blackness, and the swaying of long grass under it (whose every stalk, and sheath, and awn, and even empty glume, was clear, as they quivered, wavered, severed, and spread, or sheafed themselves together again, and hustled in their common immersion),—not only in this, and the absence of any water-plants along its margin, was the stream peculiar, but also in its force and flow. It did not lip, or lap, or ripple, or gurgle, or wimple, or even murmur, as all well-meaning rivers do; but swept on in one even sweep, with a face as smooth as the best plate-glass, and the silent slide of nightfall.

Now the truth of the old saying was made evident to Alice, that one can take a horse to water, but a score cannot make him drink, unless he is so minded. Though it was not an easy thing to get Elfrida to the water. She started away with flashing eyes, pricked ears, and snorting nostrils; and nothing but perfect faith in Alice would have made her even come anigh. But as for drinking, or even wetting her nose in that black liquid—might the horse-fiend seize her, if she dreamed of doing a thing so dark and unholy.

"You shall, you shall, you wicked little witch!" cried Alice, who was often obstinate. "I mean to drink it, and you shall drink it; and

we won't have any superstition." She leaped off lightly, with her skirt tucked up, and taking the mare by the cheek-piece of the bridle, drew her forward. "Come along, come along, you shall drink. If you don't, I'll pour it up your nostrils, Frida; somehow or other, you shall swallow it. You know I won't have any nonsense, don't you?"

The beautiful filly, with great eyes partly defiant and partly suppliant, drew back her straight nose, and blowing nostrils, and the glistening curve of the foamy lip. Not even a hair of her muzzle should touch the face of the accursed water.

"Very well then, you shall have it thus," cried Alice, with her curved palm brimming with the unpopular liquid; when suddenly a shadow fell on the shadowy brilliance before her—a shadow distinct from her own and Elfrida's, and cast further into the wavering.

"Who are you?" cried Alice, turning sharply round; "and what business have you on my father's land?" She was in the greatest fright at the sudden appearance of a foreign sailor, and the place so lonely and beyond all help; but without thinking twice, she put a brave face on her terror.

"Who am I?" said Hilary, trying to get up

a sprightly laugh. "Well, I think you must have seen me once or twice in the course of your long life, Miss Lorraine."

"Oh, Hilary, Hilary, Hilary!"

She threw herself into his arms with a jump, relying upon his accustomed strength, and without any thought of the difference. He tottered backwards, and must have fallen, but for the trunk of a pollard ash. And seeing how it was, she again cried out, "Oh, Hilary, Hilary, Hilary!"

"That is my name," he answered, after kissing her in a timid manner; "but not my nature; at the present moment I am not so very hilarious."

"Why, you are not fit to walk, or talk, or even to look like a hero. You are the bravest fellow that ever was born. Oh, how proud we are of you! My darling, what is the matter? Why, you look as if you did not know me. Help, help, help! He is going to die. Oh, for God's sake, help!"

Poor Hilary, after looking wildly around, and trying in vain to command his mouth, fell suddenly back, convulsed, distorted, writhing, foaming, and wallowing in the depths of epilepsy. Sky, hill, and tree swung to and

fro, across his strained and starting eyes, and then whirled round like a spinning-wheel, with radiating sparks and spots. Then all fell into abyss of darkness, down a bottomless pit, into utter and awful loss of everything.

The vigour of youth had fought against this robbery of humanity so long and hard that Alice, the only spectator of the conflict, began to recover from shriek and wailing by the time that her brother fell into the black insensibility. The ground sloped so that if she had not been there, the unfortunate youth must have rolled into the Woeburn, and so ended. But being a prompt and active girl, she had saved him from this at any rate. She had had the wit also to save his tongue, by slipping a glove between his teeth; which scarcely a girl in a hundred, who saw such a thing for the first time, would have done. And now, though her face was bathed in tears, and her hands almost as tremulous as if themselves convulsed, she filled her low-crowned riding-hat with water from the river, and sprinkled his forehead gently, and released his neck from cumbrance. And then she gazed into his thin pale features, and listened for the beating of his heart.

This was so low that she could not hear or

even feel it anywhere. "Oh, how can I get him home?" she cried. "Oh, my only brother, my only brother!" In fright and misery, she leaped upon a crest of chalk, to seek around for any one to help her; and suddenly she espied her groom against the sky-line, a long way off, galloping up the ridge from Chancton. In hope that one of the many echoes of the cliffs might aid her, she shrieked with all her power, and tore a white kerchief from under her riding-habit, and put it on her whip and waved it. And presently she had the joy of seeing the horse's head turned towards her. The rider had not caught her voice, but had descried some white thing fluttering between him and the sombre stripe which he was watching earnestly.

This groom was a strong and hearty man, and the father of seven children. He made the best of the case, and ventured to comfort his young mistress. And then he laid Hilary upon Elfrida, the docile and soft-stepper; and making him fast with his own bridle, and other quick contrivances, he tethered his own horse to a tree, and leading the mare, set off, with Alice walking carefully and supporting the head of her senseless brother. So came this hero, after all his exploits, back to the home of his fathers.

CHAPTER X.

THE GRAVE OF THE ASTROLOGER.

"WHAT can I do? Oh, how can I escape?" cried Alice to herself one morning, towards the end of the dreary November; "one month out of three is gone already, and the chain of my misery tightens round me. No, don't come near me, any of you birds; you will have to do without me soon; and you had better begin to practise. Ah me! you can make your own nests, and choose your mates; how I envy you! Well, then, if you must be fed, you must. Why should I be so selfish?" With tears in her eyes, she went to her bower and got her little basket of moss, well known to every cock-robin, and thrush, and blackbird, dwelling on the premises. At the bottom were stored, in happy ignorance of the fate before them, all the delicacies of the season—the food of woodland song, the stimulants of aerial melody. Here were woodlice, beetles, earwigs, caterpillars,

slugs, and nymphs, well-girt brandlings, and the offspring of the tightly-buckled wasp, together with the luscious meal-worm, and the peculiarly delicious grub of the cockchafer—all as fresh as a West-end salmon, and savouring sweetly of moss and milk—no wonder the beaks of the birds began to water at the mere sight of that basket.

"You have had enough now for to-day," said Alice; "it is useless to put all your heads on one side, and pretend that you are just beginning. I know all your tricks quite well by this time. No, not even you, you Methusalem of a Bob, can have any more—or at least, not much."

For this robin (her old pet of all, and through whose powers of interpretation the rest had become so intimate) made a point of perching upon her collar, and nibbling at her ear, whenever he felt himself neglected. "There is no friend like an old friend," was his motto; and his poll was grey, and his beak quite blunted with feeding a score of families, and his large black eyes were fading. "Methusalem, come and help yourself," said Alice, relenting, softly; "you will not have the chance much longer."

Now as soon as the birds, with a chirp and

a jerk, and one or two futile hops, had realized the stern fact that there was no more for them, and then had made off to their divers business (but all with an eye to come back again), Alice, with a smiling sigh—if there can be such a mixture—left her pets, and set off alone to have a good walk, and talk, and think. The birds, being guilty of "cupboard love," were content to remain in their trees and digest; and as many of them as were in voice expressed their gratitude brilliantly. But out of the cover they would not budge; they hated to be ruffled up under their tails: and they knew what the wind on the Downs was.

"I shall march off straight for Chancton Ring," said Alice Lorraine, most resolutely. "How thankful I am, to be able to walk! and poor Hilary—ah, how selfish of me to contrast my state with his!"

Briskly she mounted the crest of the coombe, and passed to the open upland, the long chine of hill which trends to its highest prominence at Chancton Ring—a landmark for many a league around. Crossing the trench of the Celtic camp—a very small obstruction now—which loosely girds the ancient trees, Alice entered the venerable throng of weather-beaten and

fantastic trunks. These are of no great size, and shed no impress of hushed awe, as do the mossy ramparts and columnar majesty of New-forest beech-trees. Yet, from their countless and furious struggles with the winds in their might in the wild midnight, and from their contempt of aid or pity in their loneliness, they enforce the respect and the interest of any who sit beneath them.

At the foot of one of the largest trees, the perplexed and disconsolate Alice rested on a lowly mound, which held (if faith was in tradition) the bones of her famous ancestor, the astrologer Agasicles. The tree which overhung his grave, perhaps as a sapling had served to rest (without obstructing) his telescope; and the boughs, whose murmurings soothed his sleep, had been little twigs too limp for him to hang his Samian cloak on. Now his descendant in the ninth or tenth generation—whichever it was—had always been endowed with due (but mainly rare) respect for those who must have gone before her. She could not perceive that they must have been fools, because many things had happened since they died; and she was not even aware that they must have been rogues, to beget such a set of rogues.

Therefore she had veneration for the remains that lay beneath her (mouldering in no ugly coffin, but in swaddling-clothes, committed like an infant into the mother's bosom), and the young woman dwelt, as all mortals must, on death, when duly put to them. The everlasting sorrow of the moving winds was in the trees; and the rustling of the sad, sere leaf, and creaking of the lichened bough. And above their little bustle, and small fuss about themselves, the large, sonorous stir was heard of Weymouth pines and Scottish firs, swaying in the distance slowly, like the murmur of the sea. Even the waving of yellow grass-blades (where the trees allowed them), and the ruffling of tufted briars, and of thorny thickets, shone and sounded melancholy, with a farewell voice and gaze.

In the midst of all this autumn, Alice felt her spirits fall. She knew that they were low before, and she was here to enlarge and lift them, with the breadth of boundless prospect, and the height of the breezy hill. But fog and cloud came down the weald, and grey encroachment creeping, and on the hill-tops lay some heavy sense of desolation. And Alice being at heart in union with the things around her (although she tried to be so brave), began to

be weighed down, and lonesome, sad, and wondering, and afeared. From time to time she glanced between the uncouth pillars of the trees, to try to be sure of no man being in among them hiding. And every time when she saw no one, she was so glad that she need not look again—and then she looked again.

"It is quite early," she said to herself: "nothing—not even three o'clock. I get into the stupidest, fearfullest ways, from such continual nursing. How I wish poor Hilary was here! One hour of this fine breeze and cheerful scene—— My goodness, what was that!"

The cracking of a twig, without any sign of what had cracked it; the rustle of trodden leaves; but no one, in and out the graves of leafage, visible to trample them. And then the sound of something waving, and a sharp snap as of metal, and a shout into the distant valley.

"It is the astrologer," thought Alice. "Oh, why did I laugh at him? He has felt me sitting on his dear old head. He is waving his cloak, and snapping his casket. He has had me in view for his victim always, and now he is shouting for me."

In confirmation of this opinion, a tall grey form, with one arm thrown up, and a long cloak

hanging gracefully, came suddenly gliding between the trees. The maiden, whose brain had been overwrought, tried to spring up with her usual vigour; but the power failed her. She fell back against the sepulchral trunk and did not faint, but seemed for the moment very much disposed thereto.

When she was perfectly sure of herself, and rid of all presence of spectres, she found a strong arm behind her head, and somebody leaning over her. And she laid both hands before her face, without meaning any rudeness; having never been used to be handled at all, except by her brother or father.

"I beg your pardon most humbly, madam. But I was afraid of your knocking yourself."

"Sir, I thank you. I was very foolish. But now I am quite well again."

"Will you take my hand to get up? I am sure, I was scared as much as you were."

"Now, if I could only believe that," said Alice, "my self-respect would soon return; for you do not seem likely to be frightened very easily."

She was blushing already, and now her confusion deepened, with the consciousness that the stranger might suppose her to be admiring his

manly figure; of which, of course, she had not been thinking, even for one moment.

"I ought not to be so," he answered, in the simplest manner possible; "but I had a sunstroke in America, fifteen months ago or so; and since that I have been good for nothing. May I tell you who I am?"

"Oh yes, I should like so much to know." Alice was surprised at herself as she spoke; but the stranger's unusually simple yet most courteous manner led her on.

"I am one Joyce Aylmer, not very well known; though at one time I hoped to become so. A major in his Majesty's service"—here he lifted his hat and bowed—"but on the sick-list, ever since we fought the Americans at Fort Detroit."

"Oh, Major Aylmer, I have often heard of you, and how you fell into a sad brain-fever, through saving the life of a poor little child. My uncle, Mr. Hales, knows you, I believe, and has known your father for many years."

"That is so. And I am almost sure that I must be talking to Miss Lorraine, the daughter of Sir Roland Lorraine, whom my father has often wished to know."

"Yes. And perhaps you know my brother,

who has served in the Peninsula, and is now lying very ill at home."

"I am very sorry indeed to hear that of him. I know him, of course, by reputation, as the hero of Badajos; but I think I was ordered across the Atlantic before he joined; or, at any rate, I never met him that I know of—though I shall hope to do so soon. May I see you across this lonely hill? Having frightened you so, I may claim the right to prevent any others from doing it."

Alice would have declined the escort of any other stranger; but she had heard such noble stories of this Major Aylmer, and felt such pity for a brave career baffled by its own bravery (which in some degree resembled her poor brother's fortunes), that she gave him one of her soft bright smiles, such a smile as he never had received before. Therefore he set down his broad sketch-book, and case of pencils, and went to the rim of the Ring that looks towards the vale of Sussex; and there he shouted, to countermand the groom, who had been waiting for him at the farm house far below.

"I am ordered to ride about," he said, as he returned to Alice, "and be out of doors all day—a very pleasant medicine. And so, for

something to do, I have taken up my old trick of drawing; because I must not follow hounds. I would not talk so about myself, except to show you how it was that you did not hear me moving."

"How soon it gets dark on the top of these hills!" cried Alice, most unscientifically; "I always believe that they feel it sooner, because they see the sun go down."

"That seems to me to be a fine idea," Joyce Aylmer answered faithfully. And his mind was in a loose condition of reason all the way to Coombe Lorraine.

CHAPTER XI.

COURTLY MANNERS.

SIR REMNANT CHAPMAN, in his dry old fashion, was a strongly-determined man. He knew the bitter strait of Coombe Lorraine for ready money; and from his father, Sir Barker Chapman (a notorious usurer), he had inherited the gift of spinning a disc into a globe. But, like most of the men who labour thus to turn their guineas, he could be very liberal with them for the advancement of his family. And though the Chapmans had gradually acquired such a length of rent-roll, their pedigree was comparatively short among their Norman neighbours. Nothing would cure that local defect more speedily and permanently than a wedlock with Lorraine; and father and son were now eager tenfold, by reason of Hilary's illness. They had made up their minds that he must die within a few months; and then Alice, of

course, would be the heiress of Coombe Lorraine. But the marriage must be accomplished first, before the mourning stopped it. Then Hilary would drop out of the way; and after Sir Roland's time was passed, and the properties had been united, there ought not to be any very great trouble, with plenty of money to back the claim, in awakening the dormant earldom of Lorraine, and enhancing its glory with a Chapman.

To secure all this success at once, they set forth in their yellow coach, one fine November morning. They knew that Sir Roland was fretting and pining (although too proud to speak of it) at his son's disgrace, and the crippled and fettered fortunes of the family. Even apart from poor Hilary's illness, and perhaps fatal despondency, the head of the house of Lorraine would have felt (with his ancient pride and chivalry) that a stain must lie on his name until the money was made good again. And now the last who could prolong male heritage unbroken—of which the Lorraines were especially proud—was likely to go to a world that does not heed direct succession—except from the sinful Adam—for the want of £50,000.

Cut, and clipped, and cleft with fissures of adjacent owners, the once broad lands of Lorraine were now reduced, for the good of the neighbours. But even in those evil days, when long war had lowered everything, the residue of the estates would have been for that sum good security, being worth about twice the money. This, however, was of no avail; because, by the deed of settlement (made in the time of the late Sir Roger, under the Lady Valeria), nothing could be bound, beyond life-interest, while Alice was living, and under age. This point had been settled hopelessly, by reference to the highest and deepest legal authority of the age, Sir Glanvil Malahide, K.C. Sir Glanvil was not at all the man to stultify his own doings. He had been instructed to tie tight; and he was pleased to show now how tight he had tied, after his own remonstrance. "I am of opinion," wrote this great lawyer (after drawing his pen through the endorsement of a fifty-guinea fee on the case), "that under the indentures of Lease and Release, dated Aug. 5th and 6th, 1799, the estates comprised therein are assured to uses precluding any possibility of valid title being made, until Alice Lorraine is of age, or deceased." There was a

good deal more, of course; but that was the gist of the matter.

Having learned from the rector how these things stood, the captain devised a clever stroke, by which he could render the escape of Alice almost an impossibility. For by this contrivance he could make Sir Roland most desirous of the match, who up to the present, though well aware of the many substantial advantages offered, had always listened to his daughter's pleading, and promised not to hurry her. The captain's plan was very simple, as all great ideas are; the honour of the family was to be redeemed by the sacrifice of Alice. For, among other points, it had been arranged, upon the treaty of marriage, that £50,000 should be settled on Alice, for her separate use, with the usual powers of appointment.

Now the captain's excellent idea was, that on his wedding-day, this sum should be paid in hard cash to Sir Roland and Hilary, as trustees for Alice; and they, by deed of even date, should charge that sum on the Lorraine estate—"*valeat quantum*," as the lawyers say; for they could only bind their own interests. The solicitors would be directed to waive the obvious objections, which might lead to mis-

chief, or might not, according to circumstances. Thus the flaw of title, which would be fatal to any cold-blooded mortgage, might well be turned to good use, when stopped by a snug little family arrangement.

Sir Remnant, with inherited instinct, saw the blot of this conception. "It comes to this," he said, as soon as ever he was told of it, "that you get the Lorraine property saddled with a loss of £50,000, which has gone to the scoundrelly Government! The Government rob us all they can. In a sensible point of view, young Lorraine is the first sensible man of his family. He has stolen £50,000, which the Government stole from us tax-payers. As for paying it back again—an idiot might think of it! It makes me kick; and that always hurts me."

Nevertheless, he was brought round (when he had kicked his passion out), as most of the obstinate old men are, to the plans and aims of the younger ones. Steenie was a fool—they all were fools—there was scarcely any sense left in anybody but himself, and the boy who stole all that money, and was dying for fear of being prosecuted. Sir Remnant could not bring himself to believe a word of the story,

except as himself had shaped it. Thus he worked himself up, with his want of faith, to believe that poor Hilary had got the money buried somewhere on the Downs, and would dig it up like a morel, as soon as the stir of the moment was over. If so, there could be no loss after all; only it would have been very much better to make no fuss about the money stolen.

Revolving these things in his mind, and regretting the good old times when any one (if at all in a good position) might have stolen £50,000 without any trumpery scandal, this baronet of the fine old school prepared to listen, in a quiet way, to any plans that would come home again. And he thought that this plan of his son would do so, either in money or in kind. Yet having formed some misty sketch of the character of Sir Roland, each of these Chapmans wished the other to begin the overture.

It would have been pleasant for anybody quite outside of danger, to watch the great yellow coach of the captain, labouring up the chalky road, the best approach to Coombe Lorraine, now that the Steyning road was stopped, for all who could not walk a tree, by

the outburst of the water. All the roads were drenched just now; and wet chalk is a most slippery thing, especially when it has taken blue stripes from the rubbing of soft iron, the "drag" of some heavy wagon sliding down the steep with a clank and jerk. Sir Remnant had very little faith in his son's most expensive gift of driving; and he jerked out his bad head at every corner in anxiety for his good body and soul. The wicked, however, are protected always; and thus this venturesome baronet was fetched out of his coach, with much applause, and a little touch of gout about him, such as he would not stop to groan at.

Sir Roland Lorraine was not glad to see them, and did not feign to be so. He wanted to be left alone just now, with such a number of things to think of. He perceived that they were come to hurry him about a thing he was not ripe with. Knowing his daughter's steadfast nature, and his mother's stubborn stuff, in the calm of his heart he had hoped good things. To balance one against the other in psychological counterpoise—as all good English writers of the present day express it—or, as our rude granddads said, "to let them fight it out between them."

"Over your books again, Lorraine! Well, well, I can understand all that. I was pretty nigh taking to such things myself, after I put my knee-cap out. Steenie is a wonderful scholar now. I believe a' can construe Homer!"

"That depends on the mood I am in," said the captain, modestly; "sometimes I can make out a very nice piece."

"Well, that is more than any man can say in the county, that I know of. Except, of course, one or two new parsons, and Sir Roland here, and some ragamuffins that come about teaching their stuff in lodgings. Lorraine now, after all, how are you? How do you get through these bad times?"

Sir Roland Lorraine, for the third time now, shook hands with Sir Remnant Chapman. Not from any outburst of hospitality on his part, but because the other would have it so. A strong opinion had newly set in, that all good Britons were bound to shake hands; that dirty and cold-blooded Frenchmen bowed at a distance homicidally; and therefore that wholesome Englishmen must squeeze one another's knuckles to the utmost. And that idea is not yet extinct.

"And how is her ladyship?" asked Sir

Remnant, striking his gold-headed stick on the floor very firmly at the mere thought of her. "Do you think she will see her most humble servant? Gadzooks, sir, she is of the true old sort."

"I was amused the last time you were here," Sir Roland answered, smiling, "to find how thoroughly you and my mother seemed to understand each other. I am sure that if she is well enough to see anybody, she will see you. Meanwhile, will you take something?"

"Now that is not the way to put it. Of course I will take something. I like to see the glasses all brought in, and then the cupboards opened, and then the young women all going about, with hot and cold water, and sugar-tongs."

"We will try to do those little things aright," the host answered very quietly, "by the time of your reappearance. Trotman is come to say that my mother will do herself the honour of receiving you."

"Steenie, you stop here," shouted Sir Remnant, getting up briskly, and setting his eyebrows, eyes, and knees for business. "Steenie, you are a boy yet, and Court ladies prefer the society of men. No, no; I can pick up

my cane myself. Just you sit down quietly, Steenie, and entertain Sir Roland till I come back."

Sir Remnant, though somewhat of a bear by nature, prided himself on his courtly manners, when occasion called for them. "Gadzooks, sir," he used to say, "nurse my vittels, if I can't make a leg with the very best of them!" And he carried his stick in a manner to prove that he must have kissed hands, or toes, or something.

Entering Lady Valeria's drawing-room in his daintiest manner, the old reprobate (as he called himself, sometimes with pride, and sometimes with terror, according as his spirits were up or down) made a slow and deep obeisance, then kissed the tips of his fingers, and waved them, and, seeing a smile on the lady's face, ventured to lay his poor hand on his heart.

"Oh, Sir Remnant, you are too gallant!" said the lady, who in good truth despised him, and hated him also as the owner of great broad stripes of the land of Lorraine. "We never get such manners now; never since the Court was broken up: and things that it would not become me at all to hint at are encouraged."

"You are right, my lady; you are right all

over. Gadzooks—ahem, I beg your ladyship's pardon."

"By no means, Sir Remnant. The gentlemen always, in the best society, were allowed to say those little things. And I missed them sadly when I came down here."

"Madam, my admiration of you increases with every word you speak. From what I hear of the mock-Court now (as you and I might call it), and my son has been hand-in-glove for years with the P.R., indeed, the whole number of their Royal Highnesses,—in short, I cannot tell your ladyship—things are very bad, very bad indeed." And Sir Remnant made a grimace, as if his own whole life had been purity.

"I fear that is too true," the lady answered, looking straight at him. "We find things always growing worse, as we ourselves grow wiser. But come now, and sit in this chair, and tell me, if you please, Sir Remnant, how the poor things are getting on—your captain and my poor grandchild."

"Well, madam, I need not tell a lady of your high breeding and experience; the maids of the present day are not at all the same thing as they used to be. But, thank the Lord, they get on, on the whole, as well as can be expected.

But Sir Roland will not help us; and the young maid flies and flickers, and don't seem to come to know her own mind. You know, my lady, the Lord in heaven scarce knows what to make of them. They will have this, and they won't have that; and they hates to look at anything but their swinging-glasses."

"Oh, sir, you have not been at Court for nothing. You have come to a very sad view of the ladies. But they deserve a great deal more than that. If you were to hear what even I, at this great distance, know of them—but I will say no more; it is always best, and charitable, not to speak of them. So let us go back, if you please, Sir Remnant; I have my own ways of considering things. Indeed, I am obliged to have them, in a manner now scarcely understood. But, I hear a noise—is it a mouse, or a rat, do you think?"

It was neither mouse nor rat; as Lady Valeria knew quite well. It was simply poor Sir Remnant tapping on the floor with his walking-stick; which of course he had no right to do, while the lady was addressing him.

"It sounds like a very little mouse," he said; "or perhaps it was the death-tick. It often comes in these old rooms, when any of the people are going to die."

The old gentleman had not been at Court for nothing (as the old lady had told him); he knew how timid and superstitious were the brave women of the fine old time.

"Now, sir, are you sure that you never made a tap?" asked Lady Valeria, anxiously.

"Not a quarter of a tap, as I hope to be saved," the old reprobate answered, below his breath; "I pay no heed to nonsense; but a thing of this sort must mean something."

"There have been a great many signs of late," said the old lady after listening, with her keener ear brought round, and the misty lace of her beautiful cap quivering like a spider's web: "there seem to have been a great many signs of bad things coming, in their proper time."

"They will come before we are ready, madam; old Scratch waits for no invitation. But they say that the death-tick runs before him, and keeps time with his cloven heel."

"Oh Lord, Sir Remnant, how dreadfully you talk! I beg you to spare me; I have had no sleep since I was told of that horrible water, and of my poor grandson. Poor Hilary! He has done great things, and spent no money of his own; and indeed he had none of his own to spend; and having denied himself so, is it right

that he should be disgraced and break his heart, because he could not help losing a little money, that was not at all his own? And he had taken a town worth ten times as much; now, truly speaking, is it fair of them?"

"Certainly not, madam; pox upon them! It is the scurviest thing ever heard of."

"And you must remember, sir, if you please, that from his childhood upward, indeed ever since he could move on two legs, he always lost every sixpence put by kind people into his pockets. I gave him a guinea on his very fifth birthday; and in the afternoon what do you think he showed me? A filthy old tobacco-pipe, and nothing else—no change whatever. And his pride was more than he could set forth; though he always was a chatterer. Now, if such a thing as that could only be properly put at the Horse Guards, by some one of good position; surely, Sir Remnant, they would make allowance; they would see that it was his nature; at least they would have done so in my time."

"Of course they would, of course, my lady. But things have been growing, from year to year, to such a pitch of"—here Sir Remnant took advantage of the lady's courtly indulgence

towards bad language—"that—that—they seem to want almost, gadzooks, they want to treat men almost all alike!"

"They never can do that, good sir. They never could be such fools as to try it. And bad as they may be, they must be aware that my grandson has done no harm to them. Why, the money he lost was not theirs at all; it was all for the pay of the common soldiers. It comes out of everybody's pocket, and it goes into nobody's. And to my mind it serves them all perfectly right. Who is that General—I forget his name, an Irishman, if I remember aright—who is he, or of what family, that he should put a Lorraine to look after dirty money? The heir of all the Lorraines to be put to do a cashier's business!"

"Heaven save me from such a proud woman as this!" thought poor Sir Remnant Chapman; "if Alice is like her, the Lord have pity on our unlucky Steenie! He won't dare have his nip of brandy, even in a corner!"

"And now, poor dear, he is very ill indeed," continued the ancient lady, recovering from the indignation which had even wrinkled her firm and smooth forehead; "he has pledged his honour to make good the money; and my son

also thinks that the dignity of our family demands it; though to me it seems quite a ridiculous thing; and you of course will agree with me. And the doctors say that he has something on his mind; and if he cannot be relieved of it, he must die, poor boy. And then what becomes of the name of Lorraine, that has been here for nearly eight hundred years?"

"It becomes extinct, of course, my lady," answered Sir Remnant, as calmly as if the revolution of the earth need not be stopped; "but it might be revived in the female line, by royal licence, hereafter."

"That would be of very little use. Why, even your grandson might be a Lorraine! Is that what you were thinking of?"

"No, no, no! Of course not, my lady. Nothing could be further from my thoughts." The old baronet vainly endeavoured, as he spoke, to meet the suspicious gaze of the lady's still penetrating and bright eyes.

"We are not so particular about the spindle," she resumed with some condescension; "but in the sword-line we must be represented duly; and we never could be supplanted by a Chapman."

"Gadzooks, madam, are the Chapmans dirt?

But in order to show how you wrong us, my lady, I will tell you what I am come to propose."

Herewith he looked very impressive, and leaned both hands on his stick, as if inditing of an excellent matter. And thus he set forth his scheme, which bore at first sight a fair and magnanimous face; as if all that large sum of money were given, or without security trusted, for no other purpose, except to save a life precious to both families. The old lady listened with prudent reserve, yet an inward sense of relief, and even a faint suspicious gratitude. She was too old now to digest very freely any generous sentiment. Blessed are they who, crossing the limit of human years, can carry with them faith in worn humanity.

CHAPTER XII.

A SAMPLE FROM KENT.

Of all trite proverbs, no truer there is in the affairs of men (perhaps because in the kingdom of the clouds so untrue) than this venerable saying—"It never rains, but what it pours." The Chapmans had come, with a storm of cash, to wash away Hilary's obstructions; and now on that very same day there appeared a smaller, but more kindly cloud, to drop its little fatness.

Just when Sir Roland had managed to get rid (at the expense of poor Alice perhaps) of that tedious half-born Stephen Chapman, the indefatigable Trotman came, with his volatile particles uppermost. "If you plaize, sir," he said, "I can't stop un at all. He saith as he will see you."

"Well, if he will, he must, of course. But who is this man of such resolute mind?"

"If you plaize, sir, I never have seed un

from Adam. And I showed un the wrong way; to get a little time."

"Then go now, and show him the right way, John. I am always ready to see any one."

Sir Roland knew well that this was not true. He had said it without thinking; and, with his pure love of truth, he began to condemn himself for saying it. He knew that he liked no strangers now, nor even any ordinary friends; and he was always sorry to hear that any one made demand to see him. Before he could repent of his repentance, the door was opened, and in walked a man of moderate stature, sturdy frame, and honest, ruddy, and determined face, well shaven betwixt grey whiskers. Sir Roland had never been wont to take much heed of the human countenance; therefore he was surprised to find himself rushing to a rash conclusion—"an honest man, if ever there was one; also a very kind one."

The Grower, came forward, without any sign of humility, awkwardness, sense of difference, or that which is lowest of all—intense and shallow self-assertion. He knew that he was not of Sir Roland's rank; and he had no idea of defying it; he was simply a man,

come to speak to a man, for the love of those dependent on him, in the largeness of humanity. At the same time, he was a little afraid of going too far with anything. He made a bow (by no means graceful, but of a tidy English sort, when the back always wants to go back again), and then, as true Englishmen generally do, he waited to be spoken to.

"I am very sorry," Sir Roland said, "that you have had trouble in finding me. We generally manage to get on well; but sometimes things go crooked. Will you come, and sit down here, and tell me why you are come to see me?"

Martin Lovejoy made another bow, of pattern less like a tenter-hook. He had come with a will to be roughly received; and lo, there was nothing but smoothness. Full as he was of his errand, and the largest views of everything, he had made up his mind to say something fierce; and here was no opportunity. For he took it for granted, in his simple way, that Sir Roland knew thoroughly well who he was.

"I am come to see you, Sir Roland Lorraine," he began, with a slightly quivering voice, after declining the offered chair; "not to press

myself upon you, but only for the sake of my daughter."

"Indeed!" the other answered, beginning to suspect; "are you then the father of that young lady——"

"I am the father of Mabel Lovejoy. And sorry I should be to be her father, if—if—I mean, sir, if she was anybody else's daughter. But being as it is, she is my own dear child; and no man has a better one. And if any one says that she threw herself at the feet of your son, for the sake of his name, Sir Roland, that man is a liar."

"My good sir, I know it. I never supposed that your daughter did anything of the kind. I have heard that the fault was my son's altogether."

"Then why have you never said a word to say so? Why did you leave us, like so many dogs, to come when you might whistle? Because we are beneath you in the world, is your son to do a great wrong to my daughter, while you sit up here on the top of your hill, as if you had never heard of us? Is this all the honour that comes of high birth? Then I thank the Almighty that we are not high-born."

The Grower struck his ash-stick with dis-

dain upon the rich Turkey carpet, and turned his broad back on Sir Roland Lorraine; not out of rudeness (as the latter thought), but to hide the moisture that came and spoiled the righteous sparkle of his eyes. The baronet perhaps had never felt so small and self-condemned before. He had not been so blind and narrow-minded, as to forget, through the past two years, that every question has two sides. He had often felt that the Kentish homestead had a grievance against the South-Down castle; but with his contemplative ease, and hatred of any disturbance, he had left the case mainly to right itself; persuading himself at last that he must have done all that could be expected, in making that promise to Struan Hales. But now all the fallacy of such ideas was scattered by a father's honest wrath. And he was not a man who would argue down the rights of another; when he saw them.

"You are right, Mr. Lovejoy," he said at last: "I have not behaved at all well to you. I will make no excuses, but tell you fairly that I am sorry for my conduct, now that you put it so plainly. And whatever I can do shall be done, to make amends to your daughter."

"Amends means money, from one rank to

another. Would you dare to offer me money, sir?"

"Certainly not; it is the very last thing I ever should dream of doing. Not to mention the scarcity of cash just now. In such a case, money is an insult."

"I should think so—I should think so. What money would ever pay for our Mabel? If you had only seen her once, you could never have been angry with your son. Although I was; although I was—until I heard how ill he is. But bless you, sir, they will do these things—and there is no stopping them. It puts one into a passion with them, until one begins to remember. But now, sir, I have heard all sorts of things. Is it true that Master Hilary lies very ill abed, for want of money?"

"You put it very shortly; but it comes to that. He has lost a large sum of the public money, and we cannot very well replace it."

"Then you should a' come to me. I'll cure all that trouble in a jiffy," said the Grower, tugging heavily at something well inside his waistcoat; "there, that's a very tidy lump of money; and no call to be ashamed of it, in the way you high folk look at things—because us never made it. Not a farden of it ever saw

Covent Garden ; all come straight without any trade whatever! He can't a' lost all that, anyhow."

Martin Lovejoy, with broad-tipped fingers, and nails not altogether exempt from chewing, was working away, as he spoke, at a bag such as wheat is sampled in, and tied with whip-cord round the neck. Sir Roland Lorraine, without saying a word, looked on, and smiled softly with quiet surprise.

"No patience—I haven't no patience with counting, since I broke my finger, sir,—seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, no—well it must be right, and I've reckoned amiss; our Mab reckoned every penny—no longer than yesterday morning—twenty thousand pounds it must be, according to the ticket. There is one lot amissing ; oh, here it is, in among my fingers, I do believe! What slippery rubbish this bank stuff is! Will you please now to score them all up, Sir Roland?"

"Mr. Lovejoy, why should I do that? It cannot matter what the quantity is. The meaning is what I am thinking of."

"Well sir, and the meaning is just this. My daughter Mabel hath had a fortune left her by her godfather, the famous banker Light-

gold, over to the town of Tonbridge. No doubt you have heard of him, Sir Roland, and of his death six months agone. Well, no, I forget; it is so far away. I be so used to home, that I always speak as if I was at home. And they made me trustee for her—that they did; showing confidence in my nature almost, on the part of the laiyers, sir, do you think? At least I took it in that way."

"It was kind of you, so to take it. They have no confidence in anybody's nature, whenever they can help it."

"So I have heard, sir. I have heard that same, and in my small way proved it. But will you be pleased just to count the money?"

"I must be worse than the lawyers if I did. Your daughter Mabel must be the best, and kindest-hearted, and most loving——"

"Of course, of course," cried the Grower, as if that point wanted no establishing; "but business is business, Sir Roland Lorraine. I am my daughter's trustee, do you see, and bound to be sure that her money goes right. And it is a good bit of money, mind you; more than I could earn in all my life."

"Will you tell me exactly what she said? I should like to hear her very words. I beg

you to sit down. Are you afraid that I shall run off with the trust-funds?"

"You are like your son. I'll be dashed if you aren't. Excuse me, Sir Roland, for making so free—but that was just his way of turning things; a sort of a something in a funny manner, that won the heart of my poor maid. None of our people know how to do it; except of course our Mabel. Mabel can do it, answer for answer, with any that come provoking her. But she hathn't shown the spirit for it, now ever since—the Lord knows what was the name of the town Master Hilary took. That signifies nothing, neither here nor there; only it showeth how they do take on."

"Yes, Mr. Lovejoy, I see all that. But what was it your good daughter said?"

"She is always saying something, sir—something or other; except now and then; when her mind perhaps is too much for it. But about this money-bag she said—is that what you ask, Sir Roland? Well, sir, what she said was this. They had told me a deal, you must understand, about investing in good securities, meaning their own blessed pockets, no doubt. But they found me too old a bird for that. 'Down with the money!' says I, the

same as John Shorne might in the market. They wouldn't. They wouldn't. Not a bit of it, till I put another laiyer at them—my own son, sir, if you please, a counsellor on our circuit; and he brought them to book in no time, and he laid down the law to me pretty strong about my being answerable. So as soon as I got it, I said to her, 'Mabel, how am I to lodge it for you, to fetch proper interest, until you come of age?' But the young silly burst out crying, and she said—'What good can it ever be to me? take it all, father, take every penny, and see if it will do any good to him.' And no peace could I have, till at last I set off. And there it is, Sir Roland. But I am thinking that, the money in no way belonging to me, I am bound to ask you to make a receipt, or give me your note of hand for it, or something as you think proper, just to disappoint the laiyers."

"You shall have my receipt," said Sir Roland Lorraine, with his eyes beginning to glisten. "Meanwhile place all the money in the bag, and tie it up securely."

The Grower fetched a quiet little sigh, and allowed the corners of his mouth to drop, as he did what he was told to do. It had cost him

many a hard fight with Mabel, and many a sulky puff of pipe, to be sent on such an errand. Money is money; and a man who makes it with so much anxiety, chance of season, and cheating from the middlemen, as a fruit-grower has to struggle through,—such a man wants to know the reason why he should let it go all of a heap. However, Martin Lovejoy was one of the "noblest works of God," an honest man —though an honest woman is even yet more noble, if value goes by rarity—and he knew that the money was his daughter's own, to do what she pleased with, in a twelvemonth's time, when she would be a spinster of majority.

"I have written my receipt," said Sir Roland, breaking in on Master Lovejoy's sad retrospect at the bag of money. "Read it, and tell me if I have been too cold."

It is a thing quite unaccountable, haply (and yet there must be some cause for it), that some men who allow no tone of voice, no pressure of hand, to betray emotion, yet cannot take pen without doing it, and letting the fount of heart break open from the sealed reserve of eye. No other explanation can be offered for this note of hand from Sir Roland Lorraine. The Grower put on his specs; and then he took

them off, and wiped them; and then as the shadow of the hill came over, he found it hard to read anything. The truth was that he had read every word, but had no idea of being overcome. And the note, so hard to read, was as follows:—

"MABEL,

"I have done you much injustice. And I hope that I may live long enough to show what now I think of you. Your perfect faith and love are more than any one can have deserved of you, and least of all my son, who has fallen into all his sad distress, by wandering away from you. Your money, of course, I cannot accept; but your goodwill I value more than I have power to tell you. If you would come and see Hilary, I think it would do him more good than a hundred doctors. Sometimes he seems pretty well; and again he is fit for little or nothing. I know that he longs to see you, Mabel; and having so wronged you, I ask you humbly to come and let us do you justice.

"ROLAND LORRAINE."

CHAPTER XIII.

A FAMILY ARRANGEMENT.

It did not occur to Sir Roland Lorraine (as he shook Martin Lovejoy's hand, and showed him forth on his way to meet the Reigate coach at Pyecombe) that Mabel's rich legacy might be supposed to have changed his own views concerning her. Whether her portion was to be twenty thousand pounds or twenty pence, made very little difference to him; but what made all the difference was the greatness of her faith and love.

The Grower was a man who judged a man very much by eyesight. He had found out ever so many rogues, by means of that "keen Kentish look," for which the Sidneys, and some other old families, were famous. And having well applied this to Sir Roland, he had no longer any doubt of him. And yet, with his shrewd common-sense, he was not sorry to

button up his coat with the money once more inside it, in the sample-bag, which had sampled so much love, and trust, and loyalty. Money is not so light to come by as great landlords might suppose; and for a girl to be known to have it is the best of all strings to her bow. So Master Lovejoy grasped his staff; and it would have been a hard job for even the famous Black Robin, the highwayman of the time, to have wrested the trust-fund from him.

Covering the ground at an active pace, and crossing the Woeburn by a tree-bridge (rudely set up where the old one had been), he strode through West Lorraine and Steyning, and over the hills to Pyecombe corner, where he took the Reigate coach; and he slept that night at Reigate.

Meanwhile the Chapmans gathered their forces for perfect conquest of Alice. Father and son had quite agreed that the final stroke of victory might best be made by occupying the commanding fortress Valeria. They knew that this stronghold was only too ready, for the sake of the land below it, to surrender at discretion; and the guns thereof being turned on the castle, the whole must lie at their mercy

Yet there were two points which these

besiegers had not the perception to value duly, and seize to their own advantage. One was the character of Sir Roland; the other was the English courage and Norman spirit of Alice. "It is all at our mercy now," they thought; "we have only to hammer away; and the hammer of gold is too heavy for anything." They did not put it so clearly as that—for people of that sort do not put their views to themselves very clearly; still, if they had looked inside their ideas, they would have found them so.

"Steenie, let me see him first," said Sir Remnant, meeting his son, by appointment, at the sun-dial in the eastern walk, which for half the year possessed a sinecure office, and an easy berth even through the other half. "Steenie, you will make a muddle; you have been at your flask again."

"Well, what can I do? That girl is enough to roll anybody over. I wish I had never seen her—oh, I wish I had never seen her! She dis-dis-dis——"

"Dislikes you, Steenie! She can never do that. Of all I have settled with, none have said it. They are only too fond of you, Steenie; just as they were of your father

before you. And now you are straight, and going on so well! After all you have done for the women, Steenie, no girl can dislike you."

"That is the very thing I try to think. And I know that it ought to be so, if only from proper jealousy. But she never seems to care when I talk of girls; and she looks at me so that I scarcely dare speak. And it scarcely makes any difference at all what girls have been in love with me!"

"Have you had the sense to tell her of any of the royal family?"

"Of course I did. I mentioned two or three, with good foundation. But she never inquired who they were, and nothing seems to touch her. I think I must give it up, after all. I never cared for any girl before. And it does seem so hard, after more than a score of them, when one is in downright earnest at last, not to be able to get a chance of the only one I ever lov-lov-loved!"

"Steenie, you are a mere ass," said Sir Remnant; "you always are, when you get too much—which you ought to keep for dinner-time. I have settled everything for you up-stairs, so that it must come right, if only you

can hold your tongue and wait. I have them all under my thumb; and nothing but your rotten fuss about the young maid can make us one day later. Her time is fixed. And whether she dislikes——"

"Dis-dis-dis—what I meant to say was—despises."

"Pish, and tush, fiddlemaree! A young girl to despise a man! I had better marry her myself, I trow, if that is all you are fit for. Now just go away; go down the hill; go and see old Hales; go anywhere for a couple of hours, while I see Lorraine. Only first give me your honour for this, that you will not touch one more drop of drink until you come back for the dinner-time."

"You are always at me about that now. And I have had almost less than nothing. And even that drop I should not have had, if Alice had not upset me so."

"Well, you may have needed it. I will say no more. We will upset her pretty well, by-and-by, the obstinate haughty fagot! But, Steenie, you will give me your honour—not another drop, except water. You always keep your honour, Steenie."

"Yes, sir, I do. And I will give it. But I

must not go near either Alice or Hales. She does so upset me that I must have a drop. And I defy anybody to call upon Hales, without having two or three good glasses. Oh, I know what I'll do; and I need not cross that infernal black water to do it. I'll call upon the boy at the bottom of the hill, and play at pitch-guineas with him. They say that he rolls every night in money."

"Then, Steenie, go and take a lesson from him. All you do with the money is to roll it away—ducks and drakes, and dipping yourself. I would not have stuck to this matter so much, except that I know it for your last chance. Your last chance, Steenie, is to have a wife, with sense and power to steer you. It is worth all the money we are going to pay; even if it never come back again; which I will take deuced good care it does. You know you are my son, my boy."

"Well, I suppose I can't be anybody's else; you carried on very much as I do."

"And when my time is over, Steenie—if you haven't drunk yourself to death before me—you will say that you had a good kind father, who would go to the devil to save you."

"Really, sir, you were down upon me for

having had a sentimental drop. But, I think, I may return the compliment."

"Go down the hill, Steenie—go down the hill. It seems to be all that you are fit for. And do try to put your neckcloth tidy before you come back to dinner."

Sir Remnant Chapman returned to the house, with a heavy sigh from his withered breast. He had not the goodness in him which is needed to understand the value of a noble maiden, or even of any good girl, taken as against man's selfishness. But in his little way, he thought of the bonds of matrimony as a check upon his son's poor rambling life; and he knew that a lady was wanted in his house; and his great ambition was to see, at last, a legitimate grandson. "If he comes of the breed of Lorraine," he exclaimed, "I will settle £100,000, the very day he is born, on him."

With this in his head, he came back to try his measures with Sir Roland. He knew that he must not work at all as he had done with Lady Valeria; but put it all strictly as a matter of business, with no obligation on either side; but as if there were "landed security" for the purchase-money of Alice. And he managed all this so well, that Sir Roland, proud and

high-minded as he was, saw nothing improper in an arrangement by which Alice would become an incumbent on the Lorraine estates, for the purpose of vindicating the honour of Lorraine, and saving, perhaps, the male heir thereof. Accordingly the matter was referred to the lawyers; who put it in hand, with the understanding that the trustees of the marriage-settlement, receiving an indemnity from Sir Remnant, would waive all defects, and accept as good a mortgage as could be made by deed of even date, to secure the £50,000.

Sir Roland had long been unwilling to give his favourite Alice to such a man as Captain Chapman seemed to be. Although, through his own retiring and rather unsociable habits, he was not aware of the loose unprincipled doings of the fellow, he could not but perceive the want of solid stuff about him, of any power for good, or even respectable powers of evil. But he first tried to think, and then began to believe, that his daughter would cure these defects, and take a new pride and delight in doing so. He knew what a spirited girl she was; and he thought it a likely thing enough, that she would do better with a weak, fond husband, than with one of superior mind, who

might fail to be polite to her. And he could not help seeing that Steenie was now entirely devoted to her. Perpetual snubbings or silent contempt made little difference to Steenie. He knew that he must win in the end; and then his turn might come perhaps; and in half an hour after his worst set-down, he was up again, on the arm of Cognac.

Alice Lorraine, with that gift of waiting for destiny, which the best women have, allowed the whole thing to go on, as if she perceived there was no hope for it. She made no touching appeals to her father, nor frantic prayers to her grandmother; she let the time slip on and on, and the people say what they liked to her. She would give her life for her brother's life, and the honour of the family; but firmly was she resolved to be never the wife of Stephen Chapman.

The more she saw of this man, the more deeply and utterly she despised him. She could not explain to her father, or even herself, why she so loathed him. She did not know that it was the native shrinking of the good from evil, of the lofty from the low, the brave from the coward, the clean from the unclean. All this she was too young to think

of, too maidenly to imagine. But she felt, perhaps, an unformed thought, an unpronounced suggestion, that death was a fitter husband for a pure girl, than a rake-hell.

Meanwhile Hilary, upon whom she waited with unwearying love and care, was beginning to rally from his sad disorder and threatening decline. The doctors, who had shaken their heads about him, now began to smile, and say that under skilful treatment, youth and good constitution did wonders; that "really they had seldom met with clearer premonitory indications of phthisis pulmonum, complicated by cardiac and hypochondriac atony, and aggravated by symptomatic congestion of the cerebellum. But proper remedial agents had been instrumental in counteracting all organic cachexy, and now all the principles of sound hygiene imperatively demanded quietude." In plain English, he was better, and must not be worried. Therefore he was not even told of the arrangement about his sister. Alice used to come and sit by his bed, or sofa, or easy-chair, as he grew a little stronger, and talk light nonsense to him, as if her heart was above all cloud and care. If he alluded to any trouble, she turned it at once to ridicule;

and when he spoke of his indistinct remembrance of the Woeburn, she made him laugh till his heart grew fat, by her mimicry of Nanny Stilgoe, whom she could do to the very life. "How gay you are, Lallie; I never saw such a girl!" he exclaimed, with the gratitude which arises from liberated levity. "You do her with the stick so well! Do her again with the stick, dear Lallie." His mind was a little childish now, from long lassitude of indoor life, which is enough to weaken and depress the finest mind that ever came from heaven, and hankers for sight of its birth-place. In a word, Alice Lorraine was bestowing whatever of mirth or fun she had left (in the face of the coming conflict), all the liveliness of her life, and revolt of bright youth against misery, to make her poor brother laugh a little and begin to look like himself again.

CHAPTER XIV.

BETTER THAN THE DOCTORS.

HILARY'S luck was beginning to turn. For in a few days he received a grand addition to his stock of comforts, and wholesome encouragement to get well. For after the Grower's return to his home, and recovery from hard Sussex air (which upset him for two days and three nights, "from the want of any fruitiness about it") a solemn council was called and held in the state apartment of Applewood farm. There were no less than five personages present, all ready to entertain and maintain fundamentally opposite opinions. Mr. Martin Lovejoy, M.G., Mrs. Martin Lovejoy, Counsellor Gregory Lovejoy (brought down upon special retainer), Miss Phyllis Catherow, and Lieutenant Charles Lovejoy, R.N. Poor Mabel was not allowed to be present, for fear she should cry and disturb strong minds, and

corrode all bright honour with mercy. The Grower thought that Master John Shorne, as the London representative of the house, was entitled to be admitted; but no one else saw it in that light, and so the counsel of a Kentish crust was lost.

The question before the meeting was—Whether without lese-majesty of the ancient Lovejoy family, and in consistence with maiden dignity, and the laws of Covent Garden, Mabel Lovejoy might accept the invitation of Coombe Lorraine. A great deal was said upon either side, but no one convinced or converted, till the master said, "You may all talk as you like; but I will have my own way, mind."

Mrs. Lovejoy and Gregory were against accepting anything; a letter written on the spur of the moment was not the proper overture; neither ought Mabel to go at last, because they might happen to want her. But the father said, and the sailor also, and sweet Cousin Phyllis, that if she was wanted she ought to go, dispensing with small formality; especially if she should want to go.

She did want to go; and go she did, backed up by kind opinions; and her father being busy with his pears and hops (which were poor and

late this wet season), the fine young sailor, now adrift on shore—while his ship was refitting at Chatham—made sail, with his sister in convoy, for the old roadstead of the South Downs. Gregory (who had refused to go, for reasons best known to himself, but sensible and sound ones) wished them good luck, and returned to his chambers in the Middle Temple.

Now there is no time to set forth how these two themselves set forth; the sailor with all the high spirit of the sea, when it overruns the land; the spinster inclined to be meditative, tranquil, and deep of eye and heart; yet compelled to come out of herself and smile, and then let herself come into her smile. It is a way all kind-hearted girls have, when they know that they ought to be grave, and truly intend to be so, yet cannot put a chain on the popgun pellets of young age, health, and innocence.

Enough that they had arrived quite safely at the old house in the Coombe, with the sailor of course in a flurry of ambition to navigate his father's horse whenever he looked between his ears. The inborn resemblance between ships and horses has been perceived, and must have been perceived, long before Homer, or

even Job, began to consider the subject; and it still holds good, and deserves to be treated by the most eloquent man of the age, retiring into silence.

Mr. Hales had claimed the right of introducing his favourite Mabel to his brother-in-law, Sir Roland. For amity now reigned again between the Coombe and the rectory; the little quarrel of the year before had long since been adjusted, and the parson was as ready to contribute his valuable opinion upon any subject, as he was when we began with him. One might almost say even more so; for the longer a good man lives with a wife and three daughters to receive the law from him, and a parish to accept his divinity, the less hesitation he has in admitting the extent of his own capacities. Nevertheless he took very good care to keep out of Lady Valeria's way.

"Bless my heart! you look better than ever," said the rector to blushing Mabel, as her pretty figure descended into his strong arms, at the great house door. "Give me a kiss. That's a hearty lass. I shall always insist upon it. What! Trembling lips! That will never do. A little more Danish courage, if you please. You know I am the Danish

champion. And here is the Royal Dane of course; or a Dane in the Royal Navy, which does quite as well, or better. Charlie, my boy, I want no introduction. You are a fisherman —that is enough; or too much, if your sister's words are true. You can catch trout, when I can't."

"No, sir, never. I never should dare. But Mabel always makes me a wonder."

"Well, perhaps we shall try some day, the Church against the Navy; and Mabel to bring us the luncheon. Well said, well said! I have made her smile; and that is worth a deal of trying. She remembers the goose, and the stuffing, and how she took in the clerk from Sussex. I don't believe she made a bit of it."

"I did, I did! How can you say such things? I can make better stuffing than that to-morrow. I was not at all at my best, then."

"You are at your best now," he replied, having purposely moved her mettle; "come in with that colour, and those sparkling eyes, and you will conquer every one."

"I want to conquer no one," she answered, with female privilege of last word; "I only came to see poor Hilary."

The rector, with the fine gallantry and

deference of old-fashioned days, led the beautiful and good girl, and presented her to Sir Roland. She was anxious to put her hair a little back, before being looked at; but the impetuous parson wisely would not let her trim herself. She could not look better than she did; so coy, and soft, and bashful, resolved to be by no means timid, but afraid that she could not contrive to be brave.

Sir Roland Lorraine came forward gently, and took her hand, and kissed her. He felt in his heart that he had been hard upon this very pretty maiden, imputing petty ambition to her; which one glance of her true dear eyes disproved to his mind for ever. She was come to see Hilary; nothing more. Her whole heart was on Hilary. She had much admiration of Sir Roland, as her clear eyes told him. But she had more than admiration for some one on another floor.

"You want to go upstairs, my dear," Sir Roland said, with the usual bathos of all critical moments; "you would like to take off your things, and so on, before you see poor Hilary."

"Of course she must touch herself up," cried the rector; "what do you know about young women? Roland, where is Mrs. Pipkins?"

"I told her to be not so very far off; but she is boiling down bullace-plums, or something, of the highest national importance. We could not tell when this dear child would come, or we might have received her better."

"Oh, I am so glad! You cannot receive me, you could not receive me, better. And now that you have called me your dear child, I shall always love you. I did not think that you would do it. And I came for nothing of the kind. I only came for Hilary."

"Oh, we quite understand that we are nobodies," answered Sir Roland, smiling; "you shall go to him directly. But you must not be frightened by his appearance. He has been a good deal knocked about, and fallen into sad trouble; but we all hope that now he is getting better, and the sight of you will be better than a hundred doctors to him. But you must not stay very long of course, and you must keep him very quiet. But I need not tell you—I see that you have a natural gift of nursing."

"All who have the gift of cookery have the gift of nursing," exclaimed Mr. Hales, "because 'omne majus continet in se minus.' Ah, Roland, you think nothing of my learning. If only you knew how I am pervaded with Latin, and with logic!"

These elderly gentlemen chattered thus because they were gentlemen. They saw that poor Mabel longed to have their attention nicely withdrawn from her; and without showing what they saw, they nicely thus withdrew it. Then Alice, having heard of Miss Lovejoy's arrival, came down and was good to her, and their hearts were speedily drawn together by their common anxiety. Alice thought Mabel the prettiest girl she had ever seen anywhere; and Mabel thought Alice the loveliest lady that could exist, out of a picture.

What passed between Mabel and Hilary may better be imagined duly, than put into clumsy words.

CHAPTER XV.

IMPENDING DARKNESS.

THE darkness of the hardest winter of the present century—so far as three-fourths of its span enable us to estimate—was gathering over the South Down hills, and all hills and valleys of England. There may have been severer cold, by fits and starts, before and since; but the special character of this winter was the consistent low temperature. There may have been some fiercer winters, whose traditions still abide, and terrify us beyond range of test and fair thermometer. But within the range of trusty records, there has been no frost to equal that which began on Christmas-day, 1813.

Seven weeks it lasted, and then broke up, and then began again, and lingered; so that in hilly parts the snowdrifts chilled not only the lap of May, but the rosy skirt of June. That winter was remarkable, not only for

perpetual frost, but for continual snowfall; so that no man of the most legal mind could tell when he was trespassing. Hedges and ditches were all alike, and hollow places were made high; and hundreds of men fell into drifts; and some few saved their lives by building frozen snow to roof them, and cuddling their knees and chins together in a pure white home, having heard the famous and true history of Elizabeth Woodcock.

But now, before this style of things set in, in bitter earnest, nobody on the South Down hills could tell what to make of the weather. For twenty years the shepherds had not seen things look so strange like. There was no telling their marks, or places, or the manners of the sheep. A sulky grey mist crawled along the ground, even when the sky was clear. In the morning, every blade and point, and little spike of attraction, and serrate edge (without any intention of ever sawing anything), and drooping sheath of something which had vainly tried to ripen, and umbellate awning of the stalks that had discharged their seed, were one and all alike incrusted with a little filmy down. Sometimes it looked like the cotton-grass that grows in boggy places; and sometimes like the

"American blight," so common now on apple-trees; and sometimes more like gossamer, or the track of flying spiders. The shepherds had never seen this before; neither had the sheep—those woolly sages of the weather. The sheep turned up their soft black eyes with wonder towards the heavens,—the heavens where every sheep may hope to walk, in the form of a fleecy cloud, when men have had his legs of mutton.

It is needless to say that this long warning (without which no great frost arrives) was wholly neglected by every man. The sheep, the cattle, and the pigs foresaw it, and the birds took wing to fly from it; the fish of the rivers went into the mud, and the fish of the sea to deep water. The slug, and the cockroach, the rat and the wholesome toad, came home to their snuggeries; and every wireworm and young grub bored deeper down than he meant to do. Only the human race straggled about, without any perception of anything.

In this condition of the gloomy air, and just when frost was hovering in the grey clouds before striking, Alice Lorraine came into her father's book-room, on the Christmas-eve. There was no sign of any merry Christmas in the shadowed house, nor any young delighted

hands to work at decoration. Mabel was gone, after a longer visit than had ever been intended; and Alice (who had sojourned in London, under lofty auspices) had not been long enough yet at home, to be sure again that it was her home. Upon her return she had enjoyed the escort of a mighty warrior, no less a hero than Colonel Clumps, the nephew of her hostess. The Colonel had been sadly hacked about, in a skirmish soon after Vittoria, when pressing too hotly on the French rear-guard. He had lost not only his right arm, but a portion of his one sound leg; and instead of saying his prayers every morning, he sat for an hour on the edge of the bed and devoted all his theological knowledge to the execration of the clumsy bullet, which could not even select his weak point for attack. This choler of his made much against the recovery of what was left of him; and the doctors thought that country air might mitigate his state of mind, and at the same time brace his body, which sadly wanted bracing. Therefore it had been arranged that he should go for a month to Coombe Lorraine, posting all the way of course, and having the fair Alice to wait on him—which is the usual meaning of escort.

At the date of this journey, the Colonel's two daughters were still away at a boarding-school; but they were to come and spend the Christmas with his aunt in London, and then follow their father into Sussex, and perhaps appear as bridesmaids. Meanwhile their father was making himself a leading power at Coombe Lorraine. He naturally entered into strict alliance with his aunt's friend, Lady Valeria, and sternly impressed upon everybody the necessity of the impending marriage. "What earthly objection can there be?" he argued with Mrs. Pipkins, now Alice's only partisan, except old Mr. Binns, the butler; "even if Captain Chapman is rather lazy, and a little too fond of his wine-glass; both points are in her favour, ma'am. She will manage him like a top, of course. And as for looking up to him, that's all nonsense. If she did, he would have to look down upon her; and that's what the women can't bear, of course. How would you like it now, Mrs. Pipkins? Tut, tut, tut, now don't tell me! I am a little too old to be taken in. I only wish one of my good daughters had £50,000 thrown at her, with £20,000 a-year to follow."

"But perhaps, sir, your young ladies is not

quite so particular, and romantic like, as our poor dear Miss Alice."

"I should hope not. I'd romantic them. Bread and water is the thing for young hussies, who don't know on which side their bread is buttered. But I don't believe a bit of it. It's all sham and girlish make-believe. In her heart she is as ready as he is."

Almost everybody said the same thing; and all the credit the poor girl got for her scorn of a golden niddering, was to be looked upon as a coy piece of affectation and thanklessness. All this she was well aware of. Evil opinion is a thing to which we are alive at once; though good opinion is well content to impress itself on the coffin. Alice (who otherwise rather liked his stolid and upright nature) thought that Colonel Clumps had no business to form opinion upon her affairs; or at any rate, none to express it. But the Colonel always did form opinions, and felt himself bound to express them.

"I live in this house," he said, when Alice hinted at some such phantasy; "and the affairs of this house are my concern. If I am not to think about the very things around me, I had better have been cut in two, than made into

three pieces." He waved the stalk of his arm, and stamped the stump of the foot of his better leg, with such a noise and gaze of wrath, that the maiden felt he must be in the right. And so perhaps he may have been. At any rate, he got his way as a veteran colonel ought to do.

With everybody he had his way. Being unable to fight any more, he had come to look so ferocious, and his battered and shattered body so fiercely backed up the charge of his aspect, that none without vast reserve of courage could help being scattered before him. Even Sir Roland Lorraine (so calm, and of an infinitely higher mind), by reason perhaps of that, gave way, and let the maimed veteran storm his home. But Alice rebelled against all this.

"Now father," she said on that Christmas-eve, when the house was chilled with the coming cold, and the unshedden snow hung over it, and every sheep, and cow, and crow, and shivering bird, down to the Jenny-wren, was hieing in search of shelter; "father, I have not many words to say to you; but such as they are, may I say them?"

Sir Roland Lorraine, being struck by her quite unwonted voice and manner, rose from

his chair of meditation, left his thoughts about things, which can never be thought out by mankind, and came to meet what a man should think of foremost—his child, his woman child.

"Lallie, my dear," he said very gently, and kindly looking at her sad wild eyes, whose difference from their natural softness touched him with some terror—"Lallie, now what has made you look like this?"

"Papa, I did not mean to look at all out of my usual look. I beg your pardon, if indeed I do. I know that all such things are very small in your way of regarding things. But still, papa—but still, papa, you might let me say something."

"Have I ever refused you, Alice, the right to say almost everything?"

"No; that you have never done, of course. But what I want to say now is something more than I generally want to say. Of course, it cannot matter to you, papa; but to me it makes all the difference."

"My dear, you are growing sarcastic. All that matters to you matters a great deal more to me, of course. You know what you have always been to me."

"I do, papa. And that is why I find it

so very hard to believe that you can be now so hard with me. I do not see what I can have done to make you so different to me. Girls like me are fond of saying very impudent things sometimes; and they seem to be taken lightly. But they are not forgiven as they are meant. Have I done anything at all to vex you in that way, papa?"

"How can you be so foolish, Lallie? You talk as if I were a girl myself. You never do a thing to vex me."

"Then why do you do a thing to kill me? It must come to that; and you know it must. I am not very good, nor in any way grand, and I don't want to say what might seem harsh. But, papa, I think I may say this—you will never see me Stephen Chapman's wife."

"Well, Lallie, it is mainly your own doing. I did not wish to urge it, until it seemed to become inevitable. You encouraged him so in the summer, that we cannot now draw back honourably."

"Father, I encouraged him!"

"Yes. Your grandmother tells me so. I was very busy at that time; and you were away continually. And whenever I wanted you, I always heard 'Miss Alice is with Captain Chapman.'"

"How utterly untrue! But, O papa now, you got jealous! Do say that you got jealous; and then I will forgive you everything."

"My dear, there is nothing to be jealous of. I thought that you were taking nicely to the plan laid out for you."

"The plan that will lay me out, papa. But will you tell me one thing?"

"Yes, my dear child, a hundred things; if you will only ask them quietly."

"I am not making any noise, papa; it is only that my collar touched my throat. But what I want to know is this. If anything should happen to me, as they say; if I should drop out of everybody's way, could the money be got that you are all so steadfastly set upon getting? Could the honour of the family be set up, and poor Hilary get restored, and well, and the Lorraines go on for ever? Why don't you answer me, papa? My question is a very simple one. What I have a right to ask is this—am I, for some inscrutable reason (which I have had nothing to do with), the stumbling-block—the fatal obstacle to the honour and the life of the family?"

"Alice, I never knew you talk like this, and I never saw you look so. Why, your cheeks

are perfectly burning! Come here, and let me feel them."

"Thank you, papa; they will do very well. But will you just answer my question? Am I the fatal—am I the deathblow to the honour and life of our lineage?"

Sir Roland Lorraine was by no means pleased with this curt mode of putting things. He greatly preferred, at his time of life, the rounding off and softening of affairs that are too dramatic. He loved his beautiful daughter more than anything else on the face of the earth; he knew how noble her nature was, and he often thought that she took a more lofty view of the world than human nature in the end would justify. But still he must not give way to that.

"Alice," he said, "I can scarcely see why you should so disturb yourself. There are many things always to be thought of—more than one has time for."

"To be sure, papa; I know all that; and I hate to see you worried. But I think that you might try to tell me whether I am right or not."

"My darling, you are never wrong. Only things appear to you in a stronger light than

they do to me. Of course, because you are younger and get into a hurry about many things that ought to be more dwelt upon. It is true that your life is interposed, through the command of your grandmother and the subtlety of the lawyers, between poor Hilary and the money that might have been raised to save him."

"That is true, papa; now, is it? I believe every word that you say; but I never believe one word of my grandmother's."

"You shocking child! Yes, it is true enough. But after all, it comes to nothing. Of the law I know nothing, I am thankful to say; but from Sir Glanvil Malahide I understand, through some questions which your grandmother laid before him, that the money can only be got—either through this family arrangement, or else by waiting till you, as a spinster attain the age of twenty-one—which would be nearly two years too late."

"But, papa, if I were to die?"

"Lallie, why are you so vexatious? If you were to die the whole of the race might end—so far as I care."

"My father, you say that, to make me love you more than I do already, which is a hopeless

attempt on your part. Now you need not think that I am jealous. It is the last thing I could dream of. But ever since Mabel Lovejoy appeared, I have not been what I used to be; either with you, or with Hilary. In the case of poor Hilary, I must of course expect it, and put up with it. But I cannot see, for a moment, why I ought to be cut out with you, papa."

"What foolish jealousy, Alice! Shall I tell you why I like and admire Mabel so much? But as for comparing her with you——"

"But, papa, why do you like and admire her so deeply?"

"You jealous child, I did not say 'deeply.' But I like her, because she is so gentle, so glad to do what she is told, so full of self-sacrifice, and self-devotion."

"While I am harsh, and disobedient, self-seeking, and devoted to self. No doubt she would marry according to order. Though I dreamed that I heard of a certain maltster, who had the paternal sanction. 'Veni, vidi, vici,' appears to be her motto. Even grandmamma is vanquished by her, or by her legacy. She says that she curtseys much better than I do. She is welcome to that distinction. I am not

at all sure that the prime end and object of woman's life is to curtsey. But I see exactly how I am placed. I will never trouble you any more, papa."

With these words, Alice Lorraine arose, and kissed her father's forehead gently, and turned away, not to worry him with the long sigh of expiring hope. She had still three weeks to make up her mind, or rather to wait with her mind made up. And three weeks still is a long spell of time for the young to anticipate misery.

"You are quite unlike yourself, my child," Sir Roland said with perfect truth; "you surprise me very much to-day. I am sure that you do not mean a quarter of what you are saying."

"You are right, papa. I do not mean even a tenth part of my spitefulness. I will try to be more like Mabel Lovejoy, who really is so good and nice. It is quite a mistake to suppose that I could ever be jealous of her. She is a dear kind-hearted girl, and the very wife for Hilary. But I think that she differs a little from me."

"It is no matter of opinion, Alice. Mabel differs from you, as widely as you differ from your Cousin Cecil. I begin to incline to an old opinion (which I came across the other day),

that much more variety is to be found in the weaker than in the stronger sex. . Regard it thus——"

"Excuse me, father. I have no courage for regarding anything. You can look at things in fifty lights; and I in one shadow only. Good-bye, darling. Perhaps I shall never speak to you again as I have to-night. But I hope you will remember that I meant it for the best."

CHAPTER XVI.

A FINE CHRISTMAS SERMON.

ACCORDING to all the best accounts, that long and heavy frost began with the clearing of the sky upon Christmas-day. At least it was so in the south of England, though probably two or three days earlier in the northern counties. A great frost always advances slowly, creeping from higher latitudes. If the cold begins in London sooner than it does in Edinburgh, it very seldom lasts out the week; and if it comes on with a violent wind, its time is generally shorter. It does seem strange, but it is quite true, that many people, even well-informed, attribute to this severity of cold the destruction of the great French army during its retreat from Moscow, and the ruin of Napoleon. They know the date of the ghastly carnage of the Beresina and elsewhere, which happened more than a year ere this; but they seem to forget

that each winter belongs to the opening, and not to the closing, year. Passing all such matters, it is enough to say that Christmas-day 1813 was unusually bright and pleasant. The lowering sky and chill grey mist of the last three weeks at length had yielded to the gallant assault of the bright-speared sun. That excellent knight was pricking merrily over the range of the South Down hills; his path was strown with sparkling trinkets from the casket of the clouds; the brisk air moved before him, and he was glad to see his way again. But behind him, and before him, lay the ambush of the "snow-blink," to catch him at night, when he should go down, and to stop him of his view in the morning. However, for the time, he looked very well; and as no one had seen him for ever so long, every one took him at his own price.

Rector Struan Hales was famous for his sermon on Christmas-day. For five-and-twenty years he had made it his grand sermon of the year. He struck no strokes of enthusiasm—which nobody dreamed of doing then, except the very low Dissenters—still he began with a strong idea that he ought to preach above the average. And he never failed to do so—partly through inspiration of other divines, but mainly

by summing up all the sins of his parish, and then forgiving them.

The parish listened with apathy to the wisdom and eloquence of great men (who said what they had to say in English—a lost art for nearly two centuries), and then the parish pricked up all its ears to hear of its own doings. The rector preached the first part of his sermon in a sing-song manner, with a good see-saw. But when he came down to his parish-bounds, and traced his own people's trespasses, he changed his voice altogether, so that the deafest old sinner could hear him. It was the treat of all the year to know what the parson was down upon ; and, to be sure, who had done it. Then, being of a charitable kind, and loving while he chastened, the rector always let them go, with a blessing which sounded as rich as a grace for everybody's Christmas dinner. Everybody went out of church, happy and contented. They had enough to talk about for a week ; and they all must have earned the goodwill of the Lord by going to church on a week-day. But the rector always waited for his two churchwardens to come into the vestry, and shake hands, and praise his sermon. And, not to be behindhand, Farmer Gates and Mr. Bottler

(now come from Steyning to West Lorraine, and immediately appointed, in right of the number of pigs killed weekly, junior churchwarden)—these two men of excellent presence, and of accomplished manners, got in under the vestry arch, and congratulated the rector.

Alice Lorraine was not at church. Everybody had missed her in her usual niche, between the two dark marble records of certain of her ancestors. There she used to sit, and be set off by their fine antiquity; but she did not go to church that day; for her mind was too full of disturbance.

West Lorraine Church had been honoured, that day, by the attendance of several people entitled to as handsome monuments as could be found inside it. For instance, there was Sir Remnant Chapman (for whom even an epitaph must strain its elastic charity); Stephen, his son—who had spent his harm, without having much to show for it; Colonel Clumps, who would rise and fight, if the resurrection restored his legs; a squire of high degree (a distant and vague cousin of the true Lorraines), who wanted to know what was going on, having great hopes through the Woeburn, but sworn to stick (whatever might happen) to his own sur-

name, which was "Bloggs;" and last, and best of all, Joyce Aylmer, Viscount Aylmer's only son, of a true old English family, but not a very wealthy one.

"A merry Christmas to you all!" cried Mr. Hales, as they stood in the porch. "A merry Christmas, gentlemen! But, my certy, we shall have a queer one. How keen the air is getting!"

They all shook hands with the parson, and thanked him, after the good old fashion, "for his learned and edifying discourse;" and they asked what he meant about the weather; but he was too deep to tell them. Even he had been wrong upon that matter, and had grown too wise to commit himself. Then Cecil, who followed her father of course, made the proper curtseys, as the men made bows to her; and Major Aylmer's horse was brought, and a carriage for the rest of them.

"Are you coming with us, Rector? We dine early," said Sir Remnant, with a hungry squeak. "You can't have another service, can you? God knows, you have done enough for one day."

"Enough to satisfy you, at any rate," the rector answered, smiling; "but I should have my house about my ears, if I dined outside of

it on a Christmas-day. Plain and wholesome and juicy fare, sir—none of your foreign poisons. Well, good-bye, gentlemen, I shall hope to see all of you again to morrow, if the snow is not too deep." The rector knew that a very little snow would be quite enough to stop them, on the morning of the morrow—the Sunday.

"Snow, indeed! No sign of snow!" Sir Remnant answered sharply; he had an inborn hate of snow, and he wanted to be at home on the Monday. "But I say, Missie, remember one thing. Tuesday fortnight is the day. Have all your fal-lals ready. Blushing bridesmaids—ah! fine creatures! I shall claim a score of busses, mind. Don't you wish it was your own turn, eh?"

The old rogue, with a hearty smack, blew a kiss to Cecil Hales, who blushed and shivered, and then tried to smile, for fear of losing her locket; for it had been whispered that Sir Remnant Chapman had ordered a ten-guinea locket in London for each of the six bridesmaids. So checking the pert reply, which trembled on the tip of her tongue, she made them a pretty curtsey, as they drove away.

"Now, did you observe, papa," she asked, as she took her father's arm, beautifully to gossip

with him all up the street, "how terribly pale Major Aylmer turned, when he heard about the bridesmaids? I thought he was going to drop; as they say he used to do, when he first came home from America. I am sure I was right, papa; I am sure I was, in what I told you the other day."

"Nonsense, fiddlesticks, romantic flummery! You girls are never content without rivalry, jealousy, love, and despair."

"You may laugh as much as you like; but it makes no difference to me, papa. I tell you that Major Aylmer has lost his heart to Alice, a great deal worse than he lost his head in America."

"Well, then, he must live with no head and no heart. He can't have Alice. He has got no money; even if it were possible to change the bridegroom at the door of the church."

"I will tell you what proves it beyond all dispute. You know how that wretched little Captain Chapman looks up when he hates any one, and thinks he has made a hit of it. There —like that; only I can't do it, until I get much uglier. He often does it to me, you know. And then he patted his wonderful waistcoat."

"Now, Cecil, what spiteful things girls are! It is quite impossible that he can hate you."

"I am thankful to say that he does, papa; or perhaps you might have sold me to [illegible] ever any girl was sold, Alice is both bought and sold. And Sir Roland cannot love her, as she used to think, or he would have had nothing to do with it. It must be fearfully bitter for her. And to marry a man who is tipsy every night, and tremulous every morning. Oh, papa, papa!"

"My dear, you exaggerate horribly. You have always disliked poor Steenie; perhaps that is why he looks up to you. We must hope for the best; we must hope for the best. Why, bless my heart, if every man was to have the whole of his doings raked up, I should never want the marriage-register!"

"Oh, but papa, if we could only manage to change the man, you know! The other is so different; so kind, and noble, and grand, and simple! If any man in all the world is worthy to marry dear Alice, it is Major Aylmer."

"The man might be changed; but not the money," said the rector, rather shortly; and his daughter knew from the tone of his voice that she must quit the subject; the truth being (as she was well aware) that her father was growing a little ashamed of his own share in the business.

CHAPTER XVII.

COMING DOWN IN EARNEST.

DARK weather and dark fortune do not always come together. Indeed, the spirit of the British race, and the cheer flowing from high spirit, seem to be most forward in the worst conditions of the weather. Something to battle with, something to talk about, something to make the father more than usually welcome, and the hearth more bright and warm to him, and something also which enlarges, by arousing charity, and spreads a man's interior comfort into general goodwill—bitter weather, at the proper season, is not wholly bitterness.

But when half-a-dozen gentlemen, who care not a fig for one another, hate books (as they hated their hornbooks), scorn all indoor pursuits, but gambling, gormandising, and drinking, and find little scope for pursuing these—when a number of these are snowed up together, and

cannot see out of the windows—to express it daintily, there is likely to be much malediction.

And this is exactly what fell upon them, for more than a week, at Coombe Lorraine. They made a most excellent dinner on Christmas-day, about three o'clock, as they all declared; and, in spite of the shortness of the days, they saw their way till the wine came. They were surprised at this, so far as any of them noticed anything; for, of course, no glance of the setting sun came near the old house in the winter. And they thought it a sign of fine hunting-weather, and so they went on about it; whereas it was really one of the things scarcely ever seen down here, but common in the arctic regions—the catch, and the recast, and the dispersion of all vague light downward, by the dense grey canopy of gathering snow-vapour.

The snow began about seven o'clock, when the influence of the sun was lost; and for three days and three nights it snowed, without taking or giving breathing-time. It came down without any wind, or unfair attempt at drifting. The meaning of the sky was to snow and no more, and let the wind wait his time afterwards. There was no such thing as any spying between the flakes at any time. The flakes were not so

very large, but they came as close together as the sand pouring down in an hour-glass. They never danced up and down, like gnats or motes, as common snowflakes do, but one on the back of another fell, expecting millions after them. And if any man looked up to see that gravelly infinitude of pelting spots, which swarms all the air in a snowstorm, he might just as well have shut both eyes, before it was done by snowflakes.

All the visitors, except the Colonel, were to have left on Monday morning, but only one of them durst attempt the trackless waste of white between the South Down Coombe and their distant homes. For although no drifting had begun as yet, some forty hours of heavy fall had spread a blinding cover over road and ditch, and bog and bank, and none might descry any sign-post, house, tree, or hill, or other landmark, at the distance of a hundred yards, through the snow, still coming down as heavily as ever. Therefore everybody thought Major Aylmer almost mad, when he ordered his horse for the long ride home in the midst of such terrible weather.

"I don't think I ought to let you go," his host said, when the horse came round, as white

already as a counterpane. "Alice, where is your persuasive voice? Surely you might beg Major Aylmer to see what another day will bring."

"Another day will only make it worse," Joyce Aylmer replied, with a glance at Alice, which she perfectly understood. "I might be snowed up for a week, Sir Roland, with my father the whole time fidgeting. And after all, what is this compared to the storms we had in America?"

"Oh, but you were much stronger then. You would not be here were it not so."

"I scarcely know. I shall soon rejoin if I get on so famously as this. But I am keeping you in the cold so long, and Miss Lorraine in a chilly draught. Good-bye once more. Can I leave any message for you at the Rectory?"

In another second the thick snow hid him and his floundering horse, as they headed towards the borstall, for as yet there was only a footbridge thrown over the course of the Woeburn, and horsemen or carriages northward bound were obliged to go southward first, and then turn to the right on the high land, and thus circumvent the stream; even as Alice, quickly thinking, had enabled poor Bonny to recover his jack.

Alice went back, with a sigh, to her own little room to sit and think awhile. She knew that she had seen the last of a man whom she could well have loved, and who loved her (as she knew somehow) much too well already. Feeling that this could do no good, but only harm to both of them, he had made up his mind to go, ere any mischief should arise from it. He had no idea how vastly Alice scorned poor Steenie Chapman, otherwise even his duty towards his host might perhaps have failed him. However, he had acted wisely, and she would think no more of him.

This resolution was hard to keep, when she heard, a little later in the day, that the Major had sent back his groom, after making believe to take him. The groom brought a message from his master, begging quarters for him for a day or two, on the plea that his horse had broken down; but Alice felt sure that he had been sent back, because Major Aylmer would not expose him to the risk which he meant himself to face. For she knew it to be more than twenty miles (having studied the map on the subject) from Coombe Lorraine to Stoke-Aylmer. And all in the teeth of a bitter wind, now just beginning to crawl and wail, as only a snowy wind can do.

The rest of the gentlemen plagued the house. It was hard to say which was the worst of them—Sir Remnant (who went to the lower regions to make the acquaintance of the kitchen maids), or Colonel Clumps (who sat on a sideboard, and fought all his battles over again with a park of profane artillery), or Squire Bloggs (who bit his nails, and heavily demanded beer all day), or Steenie, who scorned beer altogether, and being repulsed by Onesimus Binns, at last got into Trotman's "study," and ordered some bottles up, and got on well. He sent for his groom, and he sent for his horn (which he had not wind enough to blow), and altogether he carried on so with a greasy pack of cards and a dozen grimy tumblers, that while the women, being strictly sober, looked down on his affability, the men said they had known much worse.

For a week Sir Roland Lorraine was compelled to endure this wearing worry—tenfold wearisome as it was to a man of his peculiar nature. He had always been shy of inviting guests; but when they were once inside his door the hospitality of his race and position revived within him. All in the house was at their service, including the master himself, so

far as old habits can be varied. But now he was almost like the whelk who admits the little crab for company, and is no more the master of his own door. No man in all England longed that the roads might look like roads again more heartily and sadly than the hospitable Sir Roland.

With brooms of every sort and shape, and shovels, and even pickaxes, all the neighbourhood turned out, as soon as ever a man could manage to open his own cottage-door. For three days it had been no good to try to do anything but look on; but the very first moment the sky left off, everybody living under it began to recover courage. The boys came first in a joyful manner, sinking over their brace-buttons in the shallow places, and then the girls came, and were puzzled by the manner of their dress, till they made up their minds to be boys for a time.

And after these came out their mother, for the sake of scolding them; and then the father could do no less than stand on his threshold with pipe in mouth, and look up wisely at the sky, and advise everybody to wait a bit. And thus a great many people managed to get out of their houses. And it was observed, not only

then, but also for many years to come, how great the mercy of the Lord was. Having seen fit to send such a storm, he chose for it, not a Wednesday night, nor a Thursday night, nor a Friday night, but a Saturday night, when He knew, in His wisdom, that every man had got his wages, and had filled his bread-pan.

As for the roads, they were blocked entirely against both wheels and horses, until a violent wind arose from the east, and winnowed fiercely. Sweeping along all the bend of the hill, and swaying the laden copses, it tore up the snow in squally spasms, and cast white blindness everywhere. Three days the snow had defied the wind, and for three days now the wind had its way. Vexed mortals could do nothing more than shelter themselves in their impotence, and hope, as they shivered and sniffed at their pots, that the Lord would repent of His anger. It was already perceived, and where people could get together they did not hide it, that Mr. Bottler must go up, and Farmer Gates come down a peg. For, although the sheep were folded well, and mainly fetched into the hollows, as soon as the drift began it was known that the very precaution would murder them. For sheep have a foolish trick of crowding into the

lee of the fold, just where the drift must be the deepest. But pigs are as clever as their mother, dirt—which always gets over everything. So Farmer Gates lost three hundred sheep, while Bottler did not lose a pig, but saved (and exalted the price of) his bacon.

When the snow, on the wings of the wind, began to pierce the windows of Coombe Lorraine (for in such case no putty will keep it out), and every ancient timber creaked with cold disgust of shrinking, and the "drawing" of all the fireplaces was more to the door than the chimney, and the chimneys drew submissive moans to the howling of the tempest, and chilly rustles and frosty taps sounded outside the walls and in—from all these things the young lady of the house gained some hope and comfort. Surely in such weather no one could ever think of a wedding; nobody could come or go; it would take a week to dig out the church, and another week to get to it. Blow, blow, thou east wind, blow, and bury rather than marry us.

But the east wind (after three days of blowing, and mixing snow of earth and sky) suddenly fell with a hollow sound, like the "convolutions of a shell," into deep silence. Clear deep silence settled on the storm of drifted

billows. As the wind left them, so they stopped, until the summer rose under them; for spring there was none in that terrible year, and no breath of summer until it broke forth. And now set in the long steadfast frost, which stopped the Thames and Severn, the Trent and Tweed, and all the other rivers of Great Britain. From the source to the mouth a man might cross them without feeling water under him.

Alas for poor Alice! The roads of the weald (being mainly unhedged at that time) were opened as if by "Sesame." The hill-roads were choked many fathoms deep wherever they lay in shelter; but the furious wind had swept the flat roads clear, as with a besom. Their brown track might be traced for miles, frozen as hard as an oaken plank, except where a slight depression, or a sudden bend, or a farmer's wall, had kept the white wave from shoaling. So, as soon as a passage had been dug through the borstall, and down the hill to the westward, the Chapmans were free to come and go with their gaudy coach as usual.

Alice took this turn of matters with all the calmness of despair. It was nothing but a childish thing to long for a few days' reprieve,

which could not help her much, and might destroy all the good of her sacrifice. In one way or the other she must go ; standing so terribly across the welfare of all that was dear to her, and seeming (as she told herself) to have no one now to whom she was dear. With no one to advise or aid her, no one even to feel for her, she had to meet the saddest doom that can befall proud woman—wedlock with an abject.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAST CHANCE LOST.

AND now there was but one day left; Monday was come, and on the morrow, Alice was to be Mrs. Stephen Chapman.

"You call yourself an unlucky fellow," said Colonel Clumps to Hilary, who was leaning back in his easy-chair; "but I call you the luckiest dog in the world. What other man in the British army could have lost fifty thousand guineas, escaped court-martial, and had a good furlough, made it all snug with his sweetheart (after gallivanting to his heart's content), and then got the chance to get back again under old Beaky, and march into Paris? I tell you they will march into Paris, sir. What is there to stop them?"

"But, Colonel, you forget that I can scarcely march across the room as yet. And even if I could, there is much to be done before

I get back again. Our fellows may go into winter quarters, and then the General's promise drops; or even without that, he may fail with the Duke of York, who loves him not."

"Stuff and rubbish, my dear boy! You pay the money—that's all you've got to do. No fear of their refusing it. Of course it will all be kept very quiet; and we shall find in the very next 'Gazette' some such paragraph as this: 'Captain Lorraine, of the Headquarter Staff, who has long been absent on sick leave, is now on his way to rejoin, and will resume his duties upon the Staff.'"

"Come now, Colonel, you are too bad," cried Hilary, blushing with pleasure, "they never could put me on the Staff again. It is impossible that they could have the impudence."

"Don't tell me. Why, they had the impudence never to put me on it! They have impudence enough for anything. You set to and get strong, that is all. Are you going to your sister's wedding to-morrow?"

"I will tell you a secret. I mean to go, though I am under strict orders not to go. What do I care for the weather? Tush, I have settled it all very cleverly. You will see me there, when you least expect it. Lallie has

behaved very badly to me; so has everybody else about it. Am I never to be told anything? She seems to be in a great hurry about it. Desperately in love, no doubt, though from what I remember of Stephen Chapman I am a little surprised at her taste—but of course——"

"Of course, of course, one must never say a word about young ladies' fancies. There was a young lady in Spain—to be sure there are a great many young ladies in Spain——"

The Colonel dropped the subject in the clumsiest manner possible. He was under medical orders not to say a word that might stir up Hilary; and yet from the time he came into the room he had done nothing else but stir him up. Colonel Clumps was about the last man in the world that ought to stump in at any sick man's door. "Dash it, there I am again!" he used to say as he began to let out something, and stopped short, and jammed his lips up, and set his wooden apparatus down. Therefore he had not been allowed to pay many visits to Hilary, otherwise the latter must soon have discovered the nature of the arrangement pending to retrieve his fortunes. At present he thought that the money was to be raised by a simple mortgage, of which he vowed, in his sanguine

manner, that he would soon relieve the estates, by getting an appointment in India, as soon as he had captured Paris. Mabel of course would go with him, and be a great lady, and make his curries. He was never tired of this idea, and was talking of it to Colonel Clumps, who had seen some Indian service, when a gentle knock at the door was heard, and a soft voice said, "May I come in?" As Alice entered, the battered warrior arose and made a most ingenious bow, quite of his own invention. Necessity is the mother of that useful being; and the Colonel having no leg to stand upon, and only one arm to balance with, was in a position of extreme necessity. Of late he had almost begun to repent of serving under Lady Valeria; the beauty and calm resignation of Alice had made their way into his brave old heart; and the more he saw of Captain Chapman, the more he looked down on that feather-bed soldier.

"Good-bye, my lad. Keep your pecker up," he said, beginning with his thick bamboo to beat a retreat; for Hilary was not allowed two visitors; "we'll march into Paris yet, brave boys; with Colonel Clumps at the head of the column. Don't be misled by appearances, Alice; the Colonel has good work in him yet.

His sword is only gone to be sharpened, ma'am; and then he'll throw away this d—d bamboo."

In his spirited flourish, the Colonel slipped, not yet being master of his wooden leg, and down he must have come, without the young lady's arm, as well as the aid of the slighted staff. Alice, in spite of all her misery, could not help a little laugh, as the Colonel, recovering his balance, strutted carefully down the passage.

"What a merry girl you are!" cried Hilary, who was a little vexed at having his martial council routed. "You seem to me to be always laughing when there is nothing to laugh at."

"That shows a low sense of humour," she answered, "or else an excess of high spirits. Perhaps in my case, the two combine. But I am sorry if I disturbed you."

"I am not quite so easily disturbed. I am as well as I ever was. It is enough to make one ill, to be coddled up in this kind of way."

"My dear brother, you are to be released as soon as the weather changes. At present nobody ventures out who is not going to be married."

"Of that I can judge from the window Lallie; and even from my water-jugs. But how is your very grand wedding to be? I

have seen a score of men shovelling. You seem to be in such a hurry, dear."

"Perhaps not. Let us talk of something else. Do you really think, without any nonsense, that all your good repute and welfare depend on the payment of the money which you lost?"

"How can you ask me such a stupid question? I never could lift up my head again—but it is not myself, not at all for myself—it is what will be said of the family, Alice. And I do not see how the raising of the money can interfere at all with you."

"No, no, of course not," she said, and then she turned away and looked out of the window, reflecting that Hilary was right enough. Neither loss nor gain of money could long interfere at all with her.

"Good-bye, darling," she said at last, forgiving his sick petulance, and putting back his curly hair, and kissing his white forehead—"Good-bye, darling; I must not stay; I always seem to excite you so. You will not think me unkind, I am sure; but you may not see me again for ever—oh, ever so long; I have so much to do before I am ready for—my wedding."

Hilary allowed himself to be kissed with brotherly resignation; and then he called merrily after her—"Now, Lallie, mind, you must look your best. You are going to make a grand match you know. Don't be astonished if you see me there. Why don't you answer?"

She would not look round, because of the expression of her face, which she could not conceal in a moment—"I am not at all sure," said the brother wisely, as the sister shut the door and fled, "that the man who marries Alice won't almost have caught a Tartar. She is very sweet-tempered; but the good Lord knows that she is determined also. Now Mabel is quite another sort of girl," &c., &c. —reflections which he may be left to reflect.

Alice Lorraine, having none to advise with, and being in her firm heart set to do the right thing without flinching, through dark days and through weary nights had been striving to make sure what was the one right thing to do. It was plain that the honour of her race must be saved at her expense. By reason of things she had no hand in, it had come to pass that her poor self stood in everybody's way. Her poor self was full of life, and natural fun, and mind perhaps a little above the average.

No other self in the world could find it harder to go out of the world; to be a self no more peradventure, but a wandering something. To lose the sight, and touch, and feeling of the light, and life, and love; not to have the influence even of the weather on them; to lie in a hollow place, forgotten, cast aside, and dreaded; never more to have, or wish for, power to say yes or no.

This was all that lay before her, if she acted truly. As to marrying a man she scorned—she must scorn herself ere she thought of it. She knew that she was nothing very great; and her little importance was much pulled down by the want of any one to love her; but her purity was her own inborn right; and nobody should sell or buy it.

"I will go to my father once more," she thought; "he cannot refuse to see me. I will not threaten. That would be low. But if he cares at all to look, he will know from my face what I mean to do. He used, if I had the smallest pain, he used to know it in a moment. But now he cares not for a pain that seems to gnaw my life away. Perhaps it is my own fault. Perhaps I have been too proud to put it so. I have put it defiantly, and not begged. I will

beg, I will beg; on my knees I will beg; I will cry, as I never cried before, oh, father, father, father!"

Perhaps, if she had won this chance, she might even yet have vanquished. For her last reflection was true enough. She had been too defiant, and positive in her strength of will towards her father. She had never tried the power of tears and prayers, and a pet child's eloquence. And her father, no doubt, had felt this change in her attitude towards him, and had therefore believed more readily his mother's repeated assertions, that nothing stood in the way of a most desirable arrangement, except the coyness of a spirited girl, whose fancy was so taken.

But the luckless girl lost all the chances of a last appeal, through a simple and rather prosaic affair. Her father was not to be found in his book-room; and hurrying on in search of him, she heard the most melancholy drone almost worse than the sad east wind. Her prophetic soul told her what it was, and that she had a right to be present. So she knocked at the door of a stern, cold room, and being told to enter, entered. There she saw seven people sitting, and looking very miserable; for

the bitter cold had not been routed by the new-made fire. One was reading a tremendous document, five were pretending to listen, and one was listening very keenly. The reader was a lawyer's clerk; three of the mock-listeners were his principal and the men of the other side; the other two were Sir Roland Lorraine and Captain Stephen Chapman. The real listener was Sir Remnant, who pricked up his ears at every sentence. Upon the table lay another great deed, or rather a double one, lease and release,—the mortgage of all the Lorraine estates, invalid without her signature, which she was too young to give.

Alice Lorraine knew what all this meant. It was the charter of her slavery, or rather the warrant of her death. She bowed to them all, and left the room; with "And the said, and the said—doth hereby, doth hereby"—buzzing in her helpless brain.

Now followed a thing which for ever settled and sealed her determination. Steenie, on the eve of his wedding-day, really felt that he ought to do something towards conciliating his bride. He really loved (so far as his nature was capable of honest love) this proud and most lovable maiden, who was to belong to him

to-morrow. And his father had said to him, as they came over to go through the legal ceremony, "Nurse my vittels, now Steenie, for God's sake, try to be a man a bit. The mistake you make with the girl, is the way you keep your distance from her. Why, they draw up their figures, and screw up their mouths, on purpose to make you run after them. I have seen such a lot of it. And so have you. All girls are alike; as you ought to know now. Why can't you treat her properly?"

The unfortunate Steenie took this advice, and he took (which was worse) a great draught of brandy. And so, when the lawyer's drone had driven him thoroughly out of his patience, at the sight of Alice he slipped out and followed her down the passage.

She despised him too much to run away, as he had hoped that she would do. She heard his weak step, and weaker breath, and stopped, and faced him quietly.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DEATH-BOURNE.

STANDING in a dark grey corner of the old stone passage, below a faded and exiled portrait of some ancestor of hers, Alice looked so calm and noble, that Steenie (although he "had his grog on board," with his daily bill of lading) found it harder than he expected to follow his father's counsel. In twenty-four hours he would have this lovely creature at his mercy; and then he would tame her, and make her love him, and perhaps even try to keep to her. For he really did love this poor girl, in a way that quite surprised him; and he could not help thinking that if she knew it, by Jove she must be grateful!

"Alice, dear Alice, sweet Alice!" he said, as at every approach she shrank further away; "lovely Alice, what have I done, that you will not yield me one beautiful smile? You know

how very well I have behaved. I have not even pleaded for one kiss. And considering all that is between us——"

"Considering the distance there is between us, you have shown your judgment."

"You do not understand me at all. What I meant was entirely different. There should be no difference between us. Why should there be? Why should there be? In a few hours more we shall both be alike; flesh of one flesh, and bone of one bone. I am not quite sure that I have got it right. But I am not far out, at any rate."

"Your diffidence is your one good point. You are very far out when you overcome it. Have the kindness to keep at a proper distance and hear what I have to say. I believe that you mean well, Stephen Chapman; so far as you have any meaning left. I believe that you even mean well by me; and, in your weak manner, like me. But if you had gone all round the world, you could not have found one to suit you less. I used to think that I was humble; as of course I ought to be; but when I search into myself, I find the proudest of the proud. Nothing but great misery could have led me to this knowledge. I speak to you now for the

last time, Stephen; and I never meant to speak as I do. But I believe that, in your little way, you like me; and I cannot bear to be thought too hard."

Here Alice could not check a sigh and a tear, at the thought of the name she might leave behind.

"What shall I do? Whatever can I do?" cried Stephen, not being such a very hard fellow, any more than the rest of us; but feeling himself unworthy even to touch her pocket-handkerchief.

"You have nothing to do, I should hope, indeed," answered Alice, recovering dignity; "I am very glad that, whatever happens, you may blame other people. Please to remember that I said that. And good-bye, Captain Chapman."

"Good-bye, till dinner-time, my darling—well, then, good-bye, Miss Lorraine."

"At any rate I am glad," she thought, as she hastened to her room, "that, even to him, I have said my last, as kindly as I could manage it."

When she entered her room, it was three o'clock, and the day already waning; though the snow from hill and valley, and the rime of

quiet frost, spread the flat pervading whiteness of the cold and hazy light. Alice looked out, and thought a little; and the scene was by no means cheering. The eastern side of the steep straight coombe (up which clomb the main road to the house) lay thirty or forty feet deep in snow, being filled by the drift that swept over its crest, for nearly the breadth of the coombe itself. But under the western rampart still a dark-brown path was open, where the wind, leaping over the eastern scarp, had whirled the snow up the western. And here, through her own pet garden, fell a direct path down to the Woeburn.

She had long been ready to believe that here her young and lively life must end. Down this steep and narrow way she had gazed, or glanced, or peeped (according to the measure of her courage), ever since the Woeburn rose, and she was sure what it meant for her. Now looking at it, with her mind made up, and her courage steadfast, she could not help perceiving that she had a great deal to be thankful for. Her life had been very bright and happy, and it had been long enough. She had learned to love all pleasant creatures, and to make them love her. She had found that nature has

tenfold more of kindness than of cruelty; and that of her kindness, all the best and dearest ends in death. Painless death, the honest and the peaceful end of earthly things; noble death, that settles all things, scarcely leaving other life (its brief exception) time to mourn.

All this lay clear and bright before her, now that the golden mist of hope was scattered by stern certainty. Many times she had been confused by weak desires to escape her duty, and foolish hankerings after things that were but childish trifles. About her bridal dress, for instance, she had been much inclined to think. Of course, she never meant to wear it; still, she knew that the London people meant to charge to a long extreme; and she thought that she ought to try it on once more, ere ever it was rashly paid for. She truly cared, no more than can be helped by any woman, whether it set her off or not; but she knew that it must be paid for, and she wanted to know if the Frenchwoman had caught any idea of her figure.

To settle this question, she locked the door, and then very carefully changed her dress. Being the tidiest of the tidy, and as neat as an old maid in her habits, she left not a pin, nor a hair on the cloth, nor even a brush set crooked.

Then being in bridal perfection, and as lovely a bride as was ever seen, without one atom of conceit, she knew that she was purely beautiful. She stood before the glass, and sadly gazed at all her beauty. There she saw the large sweet forehead (calm and clear as ever), the deep desire of loving eyes for some one to believe in, the bright lips even now relaxing into a sadly playful smile, the oval symmetry of chastened face, in soft relief against the complex curves and waves of rebellious hair. To any man who could have won her love, what a pet, what a treasure she might have been, what a pearl beyond all price—or, as she simply said to herself, what a dear good wife! It was worse than useless to think of that; but, being of a practical turn of mind, she did not see why she should put on her lovely white satin, and let no one see it.

Therefore, she rang for her maid, who stared, and cried, "Oh, laws, Miss! what a booty you do look!" and then, of course, wanted to put in a pin, and to trim a bow here, and to stroke a plait there; "It is waste of time," said Alice. Then she told her to send Mrs. Pipkins up; and the good housekeeper came and kissed her beautiful pet as she always called her (maintaining the rights of the nursery

days), and then began some of the very poor jokes supposed to suit such occasions.

"Pippy," said Alice, that the old endearment might cure the pain of the sudden check, "you must not talk so; I cannot bear it. Now just tell papa, not yet, but when the dinner is going in, give him this message—say with my love that I beg him to excuse me from coming in to dinner, because I have other things to see to. And mind, Pippy, one thing: I have many arrangements to make before I go away; and if my door should be locked to-night, nobody is to disturb me. I can trust you to see to that, I know. And now say 'good-bye' to me, Pippy, dear; I may not see you again, you know. Let me kiss you as I used to do when I was a dear good little child, and used to coax for sugar-plums."

As soon as her kind old friend was gone, Alice made fast her door again, and took off her bridal dress, and put on a plain white frock of small value; and then she knelt down at the side of her bed, and said her usual evening prayers. Although she made no pretence to any vehement power of piety, in the depth of heart and mind she nourished love of God, and faith in Him. She believed that He gives us

earthly life, to be rendered innocently back to Him, not in cowardly escape from trouble, but when honour and love demand it. In the ignorance common to us all, she prayed.

Being now in a calmer state of mind, she took from her desk a tress of long hair, the most valued of all her treasures. Her long-lost mother's; oh, if only she had a mother to advise her now! She kissed it, and laid it in her breast, and then she glided forth to steal one last sad look at Hilary. He lay with his back to her, fast asleep, and she kissed him lightly, and ran away.

Then, when all the house was quiet, except for the sound of plates and dishes (greasily going into deep baskets, one on the head of another), Alice Lorraine, having gathered her long hair into a Laconian knot, put her favourite garden hat on, and made the tie firm under her firm chin. She looked round her favourite room once more, and nodded farewell to everything, and went to seek death with a firmer step than a bride's towards a bridegroom.

Attired in pure white she walked through a scene of bridal beauty. Every tree was overcast with crystal lace and jewellery; common briars and ignominious weeds stood up like

sceptres; weeping branches shone like plumes of ostrich turned to diamond. And on the ground, wave after wave of snowdrift, like a stormy tide driven by tempestuous wind, and bound in its cresting wrath by frost.

Although there was now no breath of wind, Alice knew from the glittering whiteness that it must be very cold. She saw her pretty bower like a pillow under bed-clothes; and on the clear brown walk she scattered crumbs for the poor old robin as soon as he should get up in the morning. And there she saw her favourite rose, a cluster-rose of the softest blush, overcome with trouble now, and the hardness of the freezing world. When the spring should come again, who would there be to unroll its grubs, or watch for the invasion of green-fly?

At this thought, for fear of giving way, she gathered up her dress and ran. She had no overwhelming sense of fate, necessity, or Até—the powers that drove fair maids of Greece to offer themselves for others. She simply desired to do her duty, to save the honour of her race, and her pure self from defilement.

The Woeburn was running as well as ever, quite untouched by any frost, and stretched at

its length, like a great black leech who puts out his head for suction. Gliding through great piles of snow, it looked sable as Cocytus, with long curls of white vapour hovering, where the cold air lay on it. The stars were beginning to sparkle now; and a young moon, gazing over Chancton Ring, avouched the calm depth of heaven.

Then Alice came forward, commended her soul to God in good Christian manner, and without a fear, or tear, or sigh, committed her body to the Death-bourne.

CHAPTER XX.

BOTTLER BEATS THE ELEMENTS.

It seems to be almost a settled point in the affairs of everybody (except perhaps Prince Bismarck) that nothing shall come to pass exactly according to arrangement. The best and noblest of mankind can do no more than plan discreetly, firmly act, and humbly wait the pleasure of a just, beneficent, and all-seeing Power.

For instance, Mr. Bottler had designed for at least three weeks to slay a large styful of fat pigs. But from day to day he had been forced to defer the operation. The frost was so intense that this good Azraël of the grunters had no faith in the efficacy of his ministrations. Not indeed as regarded his power to dismiss them to a happier world. In any kind of weather he could stick a pig; the knife they could not very well decline, when skilfully

suggested; but they might, and very often did, break all the laws of hospitality, by sternly refusing to accept his salt. And the object of a pig's creation is triple—(setting aside his head, and heels, and other small appurtenances) —fresh pork, pickled pork, and bacon; and the greatest of these three is bacon.

Now what was West Lorraine to do, and even the town of Steyning? Cart-loads of mutton came into the market, from the death in the snow of so many sheep; which (as the general public reasoned) must have made the meat beautifully white; and a great many labourers got a good feed, who had almost forgotten the taste of meat; and it did them good, and kept them warm. But the "best families" would not have this; they liked their mutton to have "interviewed" the butcher, in a constitutional manner; and not being sure how to prove this point, they would not look at any mutton at all, till lamb came out of snow-drift. This being so, what was now to be done? Many people said, "live on bread, and so on, red herrings, and ship-chandler's stores, and whatever else the Lord may send." Fifty good women came up through the slow to learn the rector's opinion; and all he could say was, "Boil down your bones."

This produced such a desperate run upon the bank of poor Bonny, which really was a bank—of marrow bones, put by in the summer to season—that Jack was at work almost all the day long, and got thoroughly up to the tricks of the snow, and entirely learned how to travel it. Bonny's poor hands were so chapped by the cold, that he slurred all the polish of the rector's boots; and Mr. Hales said that he had better grease them; which cut the boy deeper than any chap.

Superior people, however, could not think of relying upon Bonny's bones; their money was ready, and they would pay for good meat what it was worth—and no more. Now a thoroughly honest man grows uneasy at the thought of getting more than he ought to get. It is pleasant to cheat the public; but the pleasure soaks down through the conscience, leaving tuberculous affection there, or bacteria; or at any rate some microscopic affliction. Bottler felt all these visitations; and in spite of all demand, he could not bring himself to do any more than treble the price of pig-meat.

"It does weigh so light this weather! Only take it in your hand," he was bound to tell everybody, for their own sakes; "now you

might scarcely think it—but what with one thing and another, that pig have cost me two and threepence a pound, and I sell him at one and ninepence!"

"Oh, Mr. Bottler, what a shame of you!"

"True, as you stand there, my dear! You might not believe it, from any one but me; till you marry, and go into business. Ah, and a very bad business it is. Starvation to everybody, unless they was bred and born to it; and even then only a crust of bread!" Mr. Churchwarden Bottler, however, did not look at all, as if he sustained existence on a crust of bread. His stockings, whiter than the snowdrifts round him, showed very substantial bulge of leg, and his blue baize apron did like duty for that part of the human being which is so fatal to the race of pigs. And the soft smile, without which he never spoke, arose and subsided in no gaunt cheeks, and flickered in the channels of no paltry chin. In a word, Mr. Bottler was quite fat enough to kill.

"Polly," he said to his favourite child, as soon as he had finished his Monday dinner; 'you have been a good child through this very bad weather; and dad means to give you a rare treat to-night. Not consarning the easing

of the pigs," he continued, in answer to her usual nod, and employing his regular euphemism ;—" there will be a many pigs to be eased, to satisfy the neighbourhood, and shut off the rogue to Bramber. But you shall see, Polly ; you shall see something as will astonish you."

Bottler put on his brown leather apron, and gently performed his spiriting.

And without any nonsense, Polly saw a lovely scene soon afterwards. For her father had made up his mind to do a thing which would greatly exalt his renown, and quench that little rogue at Bramber. In spite of the weather he would kill pigs ; and in spite of the weather, he would pickle them. He had five nice porkers and four bacon pigs, as ready as pigs can be for killing. They seemed to him daily to reproach him for their unduly prolonged existence. They could not lay on any fat in this weather, but relapsed for want of carving.

For Bottler in the morning had done this —which could not have occurred to any but a very superior mind. In his new premises facing the lane, a short way below Nanny Stillgoe's cottage, he had a little yard, well away from all thatch, and abutting on nothing but his scalding-house. This yard was square,

and enclosed by a wall of the chalky flints, that break so black, and bind so well into mortar.

Of course the whole place was still snowed up; but Master Bottler soon cured that. He went to the parish school, which was to have opened after the Christmas holidays on this 10th of January; but the schoolmaster vowed that, in such weather, he would warm no boy's educational part, unless the parish first warmed his own. And the parish replied that he might do that for himself; not a knob of coal should he have; it was quite beginning at the wrong end, to warm him first. His answer was to bolt the school door, and sit down with a pipe and a little kettle.

The circumspect churchwarden had anticipated this state of siege; for he knew that every boy in the parish (who would have run like the devil if the door was open), knowing the door to be bolted, would spend the whole day in kicking at it. And here he found them, Bonny at the head, as a boy of rising intellect and Captain Dick of the Bible-corps, and the boy who had been shot in the hedge, and many other less distinguished boys, furiously raging together because robbed of their right to a flogging.

"Come along, my lads," said Bottler, knowing how to manage boys; "you may kick all day, and wear out your shoes. I've got a job for fifty of you, and a penny a-piece for all as works well."

Not to be too long, these boys all followed Churchwarden Bottler; and he led them to his little yard, and there he fitted every one of them up with something or other to work with. Some had brooms, and some had shovels, some had spades, and some had mops, one or two worked with old frying-pans, and Bonny had a worn-out warming-pan. All the boys who had got into breeches were to have twopence apiece; and the rest, who were still stitched up at the middle, might earn a penny a head if they worked hard.

Not one of them shirked his work. They worked as boys alone ever do work, throwing all their activity into it. And taking the big with the little ones, it cost Mr. Bottler four shillings and fourpence to get some hundred cubic yards of snow cleared out so thoroughly, that if a boy wanted to pelt a boy, he must go outside for his snowball. Mr. Bottler smiled calmly as he paid them; well he knew what an area of hunger he was spreading for his good pork,

by means of this army of workboys. Then he showed the boys the pigs still living, and patted their shoulders, and smacked his lips with a relish that found an echo at more than forty hearths that evening. "Ah, won't they come up rare?" he said. "Ay, and go down rarer still," replied Bonny, already beginning to stand in high esteem for jocosity, which he did his very best to earn.

All boys other than Bonny departed with lips overflowing with love of pork into little icicles. Then Mr. Bottler went to his cart-shed, and came back with his largest tarpaulin. He spread and fixed this in a clever manner over the middle of his little yard, leaving about ten feet clear all round between the edge of it and the wall. This being done, he invited Bonny to dinner, and enjoyed his converse, and afterwards pledged himself to Polly, as heretofore recorded. Later in the day many squeaks were heard; while Bonny worked hard at the furze-rick.

All things are judged always by their results. Be it enough then to chronicle these. West Lorraine, Wiston, and Steyning itself pronounced with one voice on the following day that a thing had been done on the bank

of the Woeburn that verily vanquished the Woeburn itself. As Hercules conquered the Acheloüs, and the great Pelides hacked up by the roots both Simois and Scamander, so Bottler (a greater hero than even Nestor himself could call to mind, to snub inferior pig-stickers), Bottler aroused his valour, and scotched, and slew that Python—the Woeburn.

It is not enough to speak of such doings in this casual sort of way. Bottler's deeds are now passing into the era of romance, which always precedes the age of history. Out of romance they all emerge with a tail of attestation; and if anybody lays hold of this, and clearly sees what to do with it, his story becomes history, and himself a great historian. But lo, here are the data for any historian of duly combative enthusiasm, to work out what Bottler did.

He let Bonny work—as all heroes permit—a great deal harder than he worked himself, He calmly looked on, and smoked his pipe; and knowing quite well how the pigs would act (according to bulk and constitution) in the question of cooling down, he kept his father's watch in hand, and at proper periods eased them. Meanwhile Bonny laboured for his life,

and by the time all the pigs were ready for posthumous toilet, their dressing-room was warm and waiting for them. A porker may come home to his positive degree—pork—in less than no time. But the value of his dedication of himself—in the manner of a young curate—to the service of humanity, depends very much upon how he is treated.

The pork-trade at this time of writing is so active, that everybody—however small his operations are—should strive to give it a wholesome check rather than further impetus. And for that reason the doings of Bottler—fully as they deserve description—shall not have a bit of it.

CHAPTER XXI.

OH, HARO! HARO! HARO!

AGAIN, another thing will show how heavily and wearily all people that on earth do dwell plod and plead their little way, and are but where they came from. Three young people, all well wrapped up, and ready to face anything, set out from old Applewood farm on the very day next after Twelfth-day. They meant with one accord to be at Coombe Lorraine by the Saturday night, all being summoned upon church-service. There was not one of them that could be dispensed with—according to the last advices—and they felt their extreme responsibility, when the Grower locked them out of the great white gate.

"Now don't make fools of yourselves," he shouted; "you won't be there quite so soon as you think." They laughed him to scorn; but even before they got to Tonbridge a snowstorm

came behind them, and quite smothered all their shoulders up, and grizzled the roots of the whiskers of the only one who had any. This was Counsellor Gregory, and the other two laughed at him, and vowed that his wig must have slipped down there, and then flicked him with pocket-handkerchiefs.

Counsellor Gregory took no heed. He was wonderfully staid and sapient now; and the day when he had played at darts—if cross-examination could have fetched it up—would have been to his expanded mind a painful remembrance of All-fool's day. He stuck to his circuit, and cultivated the art of circuitous language. And being a sound and diligent lawyer, of good face and temper, he was able already to pay a clerk, who carried his bag and cleaned his boots.

But any client who had seen him now driving two spirited horses actually in tandem process, and sitting as if he were on the King's Bench, would have met him at the gate with a "quo warranto," if not a "quousque tandem?" He was well aware of this; his conscience told him that a firm of attorneys abode in the chief street of Tonbridge, and in spite of the snow either partner or clerk would almost be sure to be out at the door. He would not have been

the Grower's son if he had tried to circumvent them; so he drove by their door, and the senior partner took off his hat to Mabel, and said that Gregory was a most rising young man.

Mabel sat in the middle, of course, with a brother on either side to break the cold wind, and keep off the snow. She laughed at the weather at first; but soon the weather had the laugh of her. According to their own ideas, they were to put up for the night at the fine old inn at Horsham, and make their way thence to Coombe Lorraine in time for dinner on the Saturday. For Mabel of course was to be a bridesmaid, the Rector's three daughters, and the Colonel's two, completing the necessary six. But it soon became clear that the Grower knew more about roads and weather than the counsellor and the sailor did. By the time these eager travellers passed Penshurst and the home of the Sidneys, the road was some eight or nine inches deep with soft new-fallen snow. They had wisely set forth with a two-wheeled carriage, strong and not easily knocked out of gear—no other, in fact, than the old yellow gig disdained by Mrs. Lovejoy. For the look of it they cared not one jot; anything was good enough for such weather; and a couple of hand-

some and powerful horses would carry off a great deal worse than that; even if they had thought of it. But they never gave one thought to the matter. Except that the counseller was a little tamed by "the law and its ramifications," they all took after their father about the *esse* v. the *videri*. Nevertheless, they all got snowed up for the Friday night at East Grinstead, instead of getting on to Horsham.

For the further they got away from home, the more they managed to lose their way. The hedges and the ditches were all as one; the guide-posts were buried long ago; instead of the proper finger and thumb, great fists and bellies of drift, now and then, stuck out to stop the traveller. "No thoroughfare here" in great letters of ivy—the ivy that hangs in such deep relief, as if itself relieved by snow—and "Trespassers beware" from an alder, perhaps overhanging a swamp, where, if the snow-crust were once cut through, a poor man could only toss up his arms, and go down and be no more heard of.

And now that another heavy storm was at it (black behind them, and white in front), the horses asked for nothing better than to be left to find their way. They threw up their fore-

locks, and jerked their noses, and rattled their rings, and expressed their ribs, and fingered away at the snow with their feet; meaning that their own heads were the best, if they could only have them. So the counsellor let them have their heads, for the evening dusk was gathering; and the leader turned round to the wheeler, and they had many words about it. And then they struck off at a merry trot, having both been down that road before, and supped well at the end of it. Foreseeing the like delight, with this keen weather to enhance it, they put their feet out at a tidy stretch, scuffling one another's snowballs; and by the time of candle-lighting, landed their three inferior bipeds at the "Green Man," at East Grinstead.

On the following day they were still worse off, for although it did not snow again, they got into an unknown country without any land-marks; and the cold growing more and more severe, they resolved to follow the Brighton road, if ever they should find it. But the Brighton coaches were taken off, and the road so entirely stopped, that they must have crossed without perceiving it. And both the nags growing very tired, and their own eyes dazed with so much white, they had made up their

minds to build themselves a snow-house like the Esquimaux, when the sailor spied something in the distance, tall and white against the setting sun, which proved to be Horsham spire. With difficulty they reached the town by starlight, and all pretty well frost-bitten; and there they were obliged to spend the Sunday, not only for their horses' sakes, but equally for their own poor selves.

To finish a bitter and tedious journey, they started from Horsham on the Monday morning, as soon as the frozen-out sun appeared; and although the travelling was wonderfully bad, they fetched to West Grinstead by twelve o'clock, and found good provender for man and beast. After an hour's halt, and a peck of beans to keep the cold out of the horses' stomachs, and a glass of cherry-brandy to do the like for their own, and a visit to the blacksmith (to fetch up the cogs of the shoes, and repair the springs), all set off again in the best of spirits, and vowing never to be beaten. But, labour as they might, the sun had set ere they got to Steyning; and under the slide of the hills, of course, they found the drift grow deeper; so that by the time they were come to the long loose street of West Lorraine, almost every soul therein,

having regard to the weather, was tucked up snugly under the counterpane. With the weary leader stooping chin to knee to rub off icicles, and the powerful wheeler tramping sedately with his withers down and his crupper up, these three bold travellers, Gregory, Mabel, and Charles Lovejoy, sitting abreast in the yellow gig, passed silently through the deep silence of snow; and not even a boy beheld them, until they came to a place where red light streamed from an opening upon the lane, and cast on the snow the shadow of a tall man leaning on a gate. Inside the gate was a square of bright embers, and a man in white stockings uncommonly busy.

"Oh, Gregory, stop for a moment," cried Mabel, "how beautifully warm it looks! oh, how I wish I was a pig!"

They drew up in the ruddy light, and turned their frosted faces, frozen cloaks, and numb hands towards it. And the leader turned round on his traces, and cheered up his poor nose with gazing; for warmth, as well as light, came forth in clouds upon the shivering air.

"What a wonderful man!" exclaimed Mabel again. "We have nobody like him in all our parish. He looks very good-natured. Oh, do let us go in, and warm ourselves."

"And get our noses frozen off directly we came out. No, thank you," said Gregory, "we will drive on. Get up, Spangler, will you then?"

He flipped the leader with his frozen lash, and the tall man leaning upon the gate (as if he were short of employment) turned round and looked at them, and bade the busy man a very good evening, and came out into the snow, as if he were glad of any wheel-track. At the turn of the lane they lost sight of him, slowly as they ploughed their way, and in another minute a very extraordinary thing befell them.

"Hark!" cried Mabel, as they came to a bank, where once the road might have gone straight on, but now turned sharply to the right, being broken by a broad black water. "I am quite sure I heard something."

"The frost is singing in your ears," said Charlie, "that is what it always does at sea. Or a blessed cold owl is hooting. Greg, what do you say?"

"I will offer my opinion," replied the counsellor, "when I have sufficient data."

"And when you get your fee endorsed. There it is again! Now did you hear it?"

She stood up between her two brothers,

and stayed herself in the mighty jerks of road, with a hand on the shoulder of each of them. They listened, and doubted her keener ears, and gave her a pull to come back again. "What a child it is!" said the counsellor, "she always loses her wits when she gets within miles of that blessed Hilary."

"Is that all you know about it—now, after all the mischief you have made! You have done your worst to part us."

Though still quite a junior counsel, Gregory had been long enough called to the Bar to understand that women must not be cited to the bar of reason. Their opinions deserve the most perfect respect, because they are inspired; and no good woman ever changes them.

At any rate, Mabel was right this time. Before they could say a word, or look round, they not only heard but saw a boy riding and raving furiously, on the other side of the water. He was coming down the course of the stream towards them as fast as his donkey could flounder, and slide, and tear along over the snow-drifts. And at the top of his voice he was shouting,—

"A swan, a swan, a girt white swan! The bootiful leddy have turned into a girt swan! Oh, I never!"

"Are you mad, you young fool? Just get back from the water," cried Gregory Lovejoy, sternly; for as Bonny pulled up, the horses, weary as they were, jumped round in affright, at Jack's white nose and great ears jerking in a shady place. "Get back from the water, or we shall all be in it!" For the wheeler, having caught the leader's scare, was backing right into the Woeburn, and Mabel could not help a little scream; till the sailor sprang cleverly over the wheel, and seized the shaft-horse by the head.

"There she cometh! there she cometh!" shouted Bonny all the while; "oh, whatever shall I do?"

"I see it! I see it!" cried Mabel, leaning over the rail of the gig, and gazing up the dark stream steadfastly; "oh, what can it be? It is all white. And it hangs upon the water so. It must be some one floating drowned!"

Charlie, the sailor, without a word, ran to a bulge of the bank, as he saw the white thing coming nearer, looked at it for an instant with all his eyes, then flung off his coat, and plunged into the water, as if for a little pleasant swim. He had no idea of the power of the current; but if he had known all about it, he would have

gone head-foremost all the same. For he saw in mid-channel the form of a woman, helpless, senseless, at the mercy of the water; and that was quite enough for him.

From his childhood up he had been a swimmer, and was quite at his ease in rough water; and therefore despised this sliding smoothness. But before he had taken three strokes, he felt that he had mistaken his enemy. Instead of swimming up the stream (which looked very easy to do from the bank), he could not even hold his own with arms and legs against it, but was quietly washed down by the force bearing into the cups of his shoulders. But in spite of the volume of torrent, he felt as comfortable as could be; for the water was by some twenty degrees warmer than the frosty air.

"Cut the traces," he managed to shout, as his brother and sister hung over the bank.

"What does he mean?' asked Gregory.

"Take my little knife," said Mabel; "it cuts like a razor; but my hands shake."

"I see, I see," nodded the counsellor; and he cut the long traces of the leader, and knotted them together. Meanwhile Charlie let both feet sink, and stood edgewise in the rapid current, treading water quietly. Of course he

was carried down stream as he did it; but slowly (compared with a floating body). And he found that the movement was much less rapid, at three or four feet from the surface. Before he had time to think of this, or fairly fetch his balance, the white thing he was waiting for came gliding in the blackness towards him. He flung out his arms at once, and cast his feet back, and made towards it. In the gliding hurry, and the flit of light, it passed him so far that he said "Good-bye," and then (perhaps from the attraction of bodies) it seemed for a second to stop; and the hand he cast forth laid hold of something. His own head went under water, and he swallowed a good mouthful; but he stuck to what he had got hold of, as behoves an Englishman. Then he heard great shouting upon dry land, and it made him hold the tighter. "Bravo, my noble fellow!" He heard; he was getting a little tired; but encouragement is everything. "Catch it! catch it! lay hold! lay hold!" he heard in several voices, and he saw the splash of the traces thrown, but had no chance to lay hold of them. The power of the black stream swept him on, and he vainly strove for either bank; unless he would let loose his grasp, and he would rather drown with it than do that.

'Now who saved him and his precious salvage? A poor, despised, and yet clever boy, whose only name was Bonny. When Gregory Lovejoy had lashed the Woeburn with his traces vainly, and Mabel had fixed her shawl to the end of them, and the tall man who followed the gig had dropped into the water quietly, and Bottler (disturbed by the shouting) had left his pigs and shone conspicuous—not one of them could have done a bit of good, if it had not been for Bonny. From no great valour on the part of the boy; but from a quick-witted suggestion.

His suggestion had to cross the water, as many good suggestions have to do; and but for Bottler's knowledge of his voice, nobody would have noticed it.

"Ye'll nab 'em down to bridge," he cried; "hurn down to bridge, and ee'll nab 'em. Tell 'un not to faight so."

"Let your'sen go with the strame," shouted Bottler to the gallant Charlie; "no use faighting for the bank. There's a tree as crosseth down below; and us'll pull 'ee both out, when 'a gets there."

Charlie had his head well up, and saw the wisdom of this counsel. He knew by long

battle that he could do nothing against the tenor of the Woeburn, and the man who had leaped in to help him, brave and strong as he was, could only follow as the water listed. The water went at one set pace, and swimmers only floated. And now it was a breathless race for the people on the dry land to gain the long tree that spanned the Woeburn, ere its victims were carried under. And but for sailor Lovejoy's skill, and presence of mind, in seeking downward, and paddling more than swimming, the swift stream would have been first at the bridge; and then no other chance for them.

As it was, the runners were just in time, with scarcely a second to spare for it. Three men knelt on the trunk of the tree, while Mabel knelt in the snow, and prayed. The merciless stream was a fathom below them; but they hung the staunch traces in two broad loops, made good at each end in a fork of bough, and they showed him where they were by flipping the surface of the water.

Clinging to his helpless burden still, and doing his best to support it, the young sailor managed to grasp the leather; but his strength was spent, and he could not rise, and all things swam around him; the snowy banks, the eager

faces, the white form he held, and the swift black current—all like a vision swept through his brain, and might sweep on for ever. His wits were gone, and he must have followed, and been swept away to another world, if a powerful swimmer had not dashed up in full command of all faculties. The tall man, whom nobody had heeded in the rush and hurry, came down the black gorge with his head well up, and the speed and strength of an osprey. He seized the broad traces with such a grasp that the timber above them trembled, and he bore himself up with his chest to the stream, and tearing off his neck-cloth, fastened first the drowned white figure, and then poor Charlie, to the loop of the strap, and saw them drawn up together; then gathering all his remaining powers, he struck for the bank, and gained it.

"Hurrah!" shouted Bottler; and every one present, Mabel included, joined the shout.

"Be quick, be quick! It is no time for words," cried the tall man, shaking his dress on the snow; "let me have the lady; you bring the fine fellow as quickly as possible to Bottler's yard. Bottler, just show us the shortest way."

"To be sure, sir," Mr. Bottler answered; "but, Major, you cannot carry her, and the drops are freezing on you."

"Do as I told you. Run in front of me; and just show the shortest road."

"Dash my stockings!" cried Master Bottler, "they won't be worth looking at to-morrow. And all through the snow, I've a kept 'un white. And I ain't got any more clean ones."

However, he took a short cut to his yard; while Aylmer, with the lady in his arms, and her head hanging over his shoulder, followed so fast, that the good pig-sticker could scarcely keep in front of him. "Never mind me," cried brave Charlie, reviving; "I am as right as ever. Mabel, go on and help; though I fear it is too late to do any good."

"Whoever it is, it is dead as a stone," said the Counsellor, wiping the wet from his sleeves; "it fell away from me like an empty bag; you might have spared your ducking, Charlie. But it must have been a lovely young woman."

"Dead or alive, I have done my duty. But don't you know who it is? Oh, Mabel!"

"How could I see her face?" said Mabel; "the men would not let me touch her. And about here I know no one."

"Yes, you do. You know Alice Lorraine. It is poor Sir Roland's daughter."

CHAPTER XXII.

AN ARGUMENT REFUTED.

WHILE these things were going on down in the valley, a nice little argument was raging in the dining-room of the old house on the hill. By reason of the bitter weather, Mr. Binns and John Trotman had brought in two large three-winged screens of ancient poikolo-Daedal canvas. Upon them was depicted every bird that flies and fish that swims, and beast that walks on the face of the earth, besides many that never did anything of the sort. And betwixt them and a roaring fire sat six good gentlemen, taking their wine in the noble manner of the period.

Under the wings of one great screen, Sir Roland Lorraine, and Colonel Clumps, and Parson Hales were sitting. In the other, encamped Sir Remnant Chapman, Stephen his son, and Mr. John Ducksbill, a fundamentally trusty solicitor, to see to the deed in the morning.

The state of the weather brought about all this. It would have been better for the bridegroom to come with a dash of horses in the morning, stir up the church, and the law, and the people, and scatter a pound's worth of half-pence. But after so long an experience of the cold white mood of the weather, common sense told everybody, that if a thing was to be done at all, all who were to do it must be kept pretty well together.

But, alas! even when the weather makes everybody cry "alas!" it is worse than the battles of the wind and snow, for six male members of the human race to look at one another with the fire in their front, and the deuce of a cold draught in their backs, and wine without stint at their elbows, and dwell wholly together in harmony. And the most exciting of all subjects unluckily had been started—or rather might be said "inevitably." Six gentlemen could not, in any reason, be hoped to sit over their wine, without getting into the subject of the ladies.

This is a thing to be always treated with a deep reserve, and confidential hint of something, that must not go beyond a hint. Every man thinks, with his glass in his hand, that he

knows a vast deal more about women than any woman's son before him. Opinions at once begin to clash. Every man speaks from his own experience; which, upon so grand a matter, is as the claw of a lobster grasping at a whale—the largest of the mammals.

"Rector, I tell you," repeated Sir Remnant with an angry ring of his wine-glass, "that you know less than nothing about it, sir. All the more to your credit, of course, of course. A parson must stick to his cloth and his gown, and keep himself clear of the petticoats."

"But, my dear sir, my own three daughters——"

"You may have got thirty daughters, without knowing anything at all about them."

"But, my good sir, my wife, at least—come now, is that no experience?"

"You may have got sixty wives, sir, and be as much in the dark as ever. Ducksbill, you know; come now, Ducksbill, give us your experience."

"Sir Remnant, I am inclined to think that, upon the whole, your view of the question is the one that would be sustained. Though the subject has so many ramifications, that possibly his Reverence——"

"Knows nothing at all about it. Gadzooks, sir, less than nothing. I tell you they have no will of their own, any more than they have any judgment. A man with a haporth of brains may do exactly what he likes with them. Colonel, you know it; come, Colonel, now, after all your battles——"

"My battles were not fought amongst the women," said Colonel Clumps, very curtly.

"Hear, hear!" cried the rector, smacking his fat leg, in the joy of a new alliance.

"Very well, sir," said Sir Remnant, with his wrath diverted from the parson to the soldier; "you mean, I suppose, that my battles have been fought among the women only?"

"I said nothing of the sort. I know nothing of your battles. You alluded to mine, and I spoke my mind." Colonel Clumps had been vexed by Sir Remnant's words. He had long had a brother officer's widow in his mind; and ever since he had been under-fitted with a piece of boxwood, his feelings were hurt whenever women were run down in his presence.

"Chapman, I think," said Sir Roland Lorraine, to assuage the rising storm, "that we might as well leave these little points (which have been in debate for some centuries) for

future centuries to settle at their perfect leisure. Mr. Ducksbill, the wine is with you. Struan, you are not getting on at all. My son has been in Portugal, and he says that these olives are the right ones."

All the other gentlemen took the hint, and dropped the pugnacious subject; but Sir Remnant was such a tough old tyrant, that there was no diverting him. He took a mighty pinch of snuff, rapped the corner of his box, and began again.

"Why, look you, Lorraine, at that girl of yours, as nice a girl as ever lived, and well brought up by her grandmother. A clever girl, too—I'll be dashed if she isn't. She has said many things that have made me laugh; and it takes a good joke to do that, I can tell you. But no will of her own—no judgment—no what I may call decision."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Sir Roland, dryly; "I thought that my daughter had plenty of all those."

"Of course you did. All men think that until they find their mistake out. Nurse my vittels, if there is any one thing a woman should know her own mind about, it would be her own marriage. But gadzooks, gentlemen, Miss

Lorraine over and over again declared that she would not have our Steenie; and to-morrow morning she will have him, as merry as a grig, sir!"

"Now, father," began Captain Chapman; but as he spoke the screens were parted; and Trotman stood there, in all the importance of a great newsbearer.

"What do you mean, sir?" cried Colonel Clumps, whose sedentary arrangements were suddenly disturbed; "by gad, sir, if I only had my bamboo!"

"If you plaize, sir," said Trotman, looking only at his master, "there be very bad news indeed. Miss Halice have adrowned herself in the Woeburn; and her corpse be at Bottler the pig-man's, dead."

"Good God!" cried the rector; and the men either started to their feet, or fell back on their chairs, according to their constitution. Sir Roland alone sat as firm as a rock.

"Upon what authority, au-thor-i-ty——" Sir Roland neither finished that sentence, nor began another. His face became livid; his under-jaw fell; he rolled on his side, and lay there. As if by a hand direct from heaven, he was struck with palsy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON LETHE'S WHARF.

As soon as the master of the house had been taken to his bedroom, and a groom sent off at full gallop for the nearest doctor, Mr. Hales went up to Stephen Chapman, who was crying in a corner, and hauled him forth, and took his hand, and patted him on the shoulder. "Come, my good fellow," he said, "you must not allow yourself to be so overcome; the thing may be greatly exaggerated—everything always is, you know. I never believe more than half of a story; and I generally find that twice too much."

"Oh, but I did so love—love—love her! It does seem too hard upon me. Oh, Parson, I feel as if I should die almost. When the doctor comes, let him see me first. He cannot do any good to Sir Roland; and Sir Roland is old, and he has always been good; but I have been a very bad man always——"

"Bad or good, be a man of some sort—not a whining baby," said the rector. "Put on your hat, and come out with me, if you have got a bit of pluck in you. I am going down to see my poor niece, at once."

"Oh, I could not do it! I could never do it! How can you ask me to do such a thing? And in such weather as this is!"

"Very well," Mr. Hales replied, buttoning up the collar of his coat; "I have no son, Stephen Chapman; and I am in holy orders, and therefore canonically debarred from the use of unclerical language; but if I had a son like you, dash me if I would not kick him from my house-door to my mixen!" Having thus relieved his mind, the rector went to the main front passage, and chose for himself a most strenuous staff, and then he pulled the wire of the front-door bell, that the door might be fastened behind him. And before any of the scared servants came up, he had thought of something. "Who is it? Oh, Mrs. Merryjack, is it?"

"Yes, sir; please, sir, the men are all away, and the housemaids too frightened to come up the stairs."

"You are a good woman. Where is Mrs. Pipkins?"

"She hath fetched up her great jar of leeches, sir; and she is trying them with poor master. Lord bless you, you might every bit as well put horse radish on him."

"And better, Merryjack—better, I believe. Now, you are a sensible and clever woman."

"No, sir. Oh, Lord, sir, I was never told that; though some folk may a' said so."

"They were right, every time they said it, ma'am. And no one has said it more often than I have. Now, Mrs. Merryjack——"

"Yes, sir; yes, sir. Anything you tells me, sir."

"It is only this: I am going, as fast as I can, to Churchwarden Bottler's. I shall take the short cut, and cross the water. You cannot do that; it would not be safe for a woman, in the dark, to attempt it. But just do this: order the light close carriage as soon as possible. The horses are roughed, to go to church to-morrow. Get inside it, with your warmest cloak on, and blankets, and shawls, and anything else you can think of, and tell the man to drive for his life to Bottler's. Women will be wanted there; for one thing, or the other."

"Yes, sir; to be sure, sir. We are always wanted. Oh's me, the poor, young dear!"

The rector set off by a path to the right, passing eastward of the Coombe, and leading, as well as might be, to the tree that crossed the water. It was a rough and dreary road; and none but a veteran sportsman could, in that state of the weather, have followed it. But Mr. Hales knew every yard of the hill, and when he could trust the drift, and where it would have been death to venture. And though the moon had set long ere this, the sky was bright, and the sparkle of the stars was spread, as in a concave mirror, by the radiance of the snow.

At Bottler's gate Mr. Hales was rudely repulsed, until they looked at him. Gregory and Bonny were on guard, with a great tarpaulin behind them; each of them having a broom in hand, ready to be thrust into anybody's face. A great glow of light was in the air, and by it their eyes shone—whether it were with ferocity, or whether it were with tenderness.

"I am her own uncle—I must go in. I stand in the place of her father."

Bonny, of course, knew his master, and opened the paling-gate to let him in. And there Mr. Hales beheld a thing such as he never had seen before. Every sign of the

singeing or dressing of pigs had been done away with. The embers of fuel, all round the grey walls, had given their warmth, and lay quivering. The grey flints, bedded in lime behind them, were of a dull and sulky red; the ground all over the courtyard steamed, as the blow of the frost rose out of it, and the cover spread overhead reflected genial warmth and comfort.

Near the middle of the yard, on a mattress, lay the form of poor Alice, enfolded in warm blankets, and Mrs. Bottler's best counterpane. That kind and good woman, with Mabel's help, had removed the wet and freezing clothes, when Major Aylmer had laid his burden in Mrs. Bottler's parlour. The only hope that the fleeting spirit might remain, or return, was to be found in warmth, or rather strong heat, applied at once; and therefore (with the Major's advice and aid) clever use had been made of Mr. Bottler's great preparations. It is needless to say that the pigman (who had now galloped off to Steyning for a doctor) would, if left to himself, have settled matters very speedily, by hanging the poor girl up head downwards, to drain off the water she had swallowed. But, now, under Major Aylmer's

care, everything had been done as well as a doctor could have managed it. The body was laid with the head well up, and partly inclined on the right side, so that the feeble flutter of the heart—if any should arise—might not be hindered. The slender feet, so white and beautifully arched, were laid on a brown stone jar of hot water; and the little helpless palms were chafed by the rough hands of Mrs. Bottler. Mabel also spread light friction, with a quick and glancing touch, over the cold heart, frozen breast, and chill relapse of everything. And from time to time she endeavoured to inspire the gentle rise and fall of breath.

The Major came forward and took the hand of his friend, the rector, silently. "Is there any hope?" whispered Mr. Hales.

"Less and less. It is now two hours since we began trying to restore her. I was nearly drowned myself, some years ago, and lay for an hour insensible. Every minute that passes now lessens the chance. But this young lady is wonderfully clever."

"I only do what you tell me," said Mabel, looking up, without leaving off her persevering efforts.

"Flying in the face of the Almighty, I call

it," cried Mrs. Bottler, who was very tired, and ought to have had equal share of the praise. "Poor dear! we had better let her bide till the doctor cometh, or the crowner."

"Not till a doctor declares her dead," said Major Aylmer, quietly; "I am delighted that you are come, Mr. Hales. You are a great reinforcement. I have longed to try my own hand, but—but you can; you are her uncle. Perhaps you have not seen a case like this. Will you act under my directions?"

"With all my heart," replied the rector, pulling off his coat, and pitching it down anywhere. "Oh, my dear, my pretty dear, I do believe you will know my touch. Go out of the way, Mrs. Bottler, now—go and make some soup, ma'am. Mabel and I, Mabel and I, when we get together, I do believe we could make a flock of sheep out of a row of flints. Now, sir, what am I do?"

Whatever he was told, he did with such a will, that presently Mabel looked up, and exclaimed with breathless delight—"Oh, I feel a little throb—I did feel a little flutter of the heart—I am almost sure I did."

"My dear girl, rub away," answered the rector; "that is right, Major, is not it?"

"I believe so. Now is the critical time. A relapse—and all is over."

"There shall be no relapse," cried the rector, working away with his shirt-sleeves up, and his ruddy face glowing in the firelight; "please God, there shall be no relapse; the bravest and the noblest maid in the world shall not go out of it. Do you know me, my darling? You ought to know your kind Uncle Struan."

Purely white, and beautiful as a piece of the noblest sculpture, Alice lay before them. Her bashful virgin beauty was (even in the shade of death) respected with pure reverence. The light of the embers (which alone could save her mouldering ash of life) showed the perfect outline, and the absence of the living gift, which makes it more than outline. Mabel's face, intense with vital energy and quick resolve, shone and glowed in contrast with the apathy and dull whiteness over which she bent so eagerly. Now, even while she gazed, the dim absorption of white cheeks and forehead slowly passed and changed its dulness (like a hydrophane immersed) into glancing and reflecting play of tender light and life. Rigid lines, set lineaments, fixed curves, and stubborn vacancy,

began to yield a little and a little, and then more and more, to the soft return of life, and the sense of being alive again.

There is no power of describing it. Those who have been through it cannot tell what happened to them. Only this we know, that we were dead and now we live again. And by the law of nature (which we under-crept so narrowly) we are driven to the opposite extreme of tingling vitality.

Softly as an opening flower, and with no more knowledge of the windy world around us, eyelids, fair as Cytherea's, raised their fringe, and fell again. Then a long deep sigh of anguish (quite uncertain where it was, but resolved to have utterance), arose from rich, pure depth of breast, and left the kind heart lighter.

"Darling," cried Mabel, "do you know me? Open your eyes again, and tell me."

Alice opened her eyes again; but she could not manage to say anything. And she did not seem to know any one. Then the doctor pulled up at the paling-gate, skipped in, felt pulse, or felt for it, and forthwith ordered stimulants.

"Put her to bed in a very warm room. The carriage is here with the blankets. But on no account must she go home. Mrs. Bottler will

give up her best room. Let Mrs. Merryjack sit up all night. She is a cook, she can keep a good fire up. Let her try to roast her young mistress. Only keep the air well moving. I see that you have a first-rate nurse—this pretty young lady—excuse me, ma'am. Well, I shall be back in a couple of hours. I have a worse case to see to."

He meant Sir Roland; but would not tell them. He had met the groom from Coombe Lorraine; and he knew how the power of life has dropped, from a score of years to three-score.

CHAPTER XXIV.

POLLY'S DOLL.

In this present state of things, and difficulty everywhere, the one thing most difficult of all is to imagine greater goodness than that of Mr. Bottler. He had a depression that could not be covered by a five-pound note, to begin with, in the value of the pig-meat he was dressing scientifically, when he had to turn it all out to be frozen, and take in poor Alice to thaw instead. Of that he thought nothing, less than nothing —he said so; and he tried to feel it. But take it as you will, it is something. A man's family may be getting lighter, as they begin to maintain themselves; but the man himself wants more maintenance, after all his exertions with them; and the wife of his old bosom lacks more nourishment than the bride of his young one. More money goes out, as more money comes in.

And not only that, but professional pride grows stronger as a man grows older and more thoroughly up to his business, especially if a lot of junior fellows, like the man at Bramber, rush in, and invent new things, and boast of work that we know to be clumsy. If any man in England was proud of the manner in which he turned out his pork, that man was Churchwarden Bottler. Yet disappointment combined with loss could not quench his accustomed smile, or plough one wrinkle in his snowy hose, as he quitted his cart on the following morning, and made his best duty and bow to Alice.

Alice, still looking very pale and frail, was lying on the couch in the pig-man's drawing-room; while Mabel, who had been with her all the night, sat on a chair by her pillow. Alice had spoken, with tears in her eyes, of the wonderful kindness of every one. Her mind was in utter confusion yet as to anything that had befallen her; except that she had some sense of having done some desperate deed, which had caused more trouble than she was worthy of. Her pride and courage were far away. Her spirit had been so near the higher realms where human flesh is not, that it was delighted to get back, and substantially ashamed of itself.

"What will my dear father say? And what will other people think? I seem to have considered nothing; and I can consider nothing now."

"Darling, don't try to consider," Mabel answered softly; "you have considered far too much; and what good ever comes of it?"

"None," she answered; "less than none. Consider the lilies that consider not. Oh, my head is going round again."

It was the roundness of her head, which had saved her life in the long dark water. Any long head must have fallen back, and yielded up the ghost; but her purely spherical head, with the garden-hat fixed tightly round it, floated well on a rapid stream, with air and natural hair resisting any water-logging. And thus the Woeburn had borne her for a mile, and vainly endeavoured to drown her.

"Oh, why does not my father come?" she cried, as soon as she could clear her mind; "he always used to come at once, and be in such a hurry, even if I got the nettle-rash. He must have made his mind up now, to care no more about me. And when he has once made up his mind, he is stern—stern—stern. He never will forgive me. My own father will

despise me. Where now, where is somebody?"

"You are getting to be foolish again," said Mabel; much as it grieved her to speak thus; "your father cannot come at the very first moment you call for him. He is full of lawyers' business, and allowances must be made for him. Now you are so clever, and you have inherited from the Normans such a quick perception. Take this thing; and tell me, Alice, what it can be meant for."

From the place of honour in the middle of the mantel-piece, Mabel Lovejoy took down a tool which had been dwelling on her active mind ever since the night before. She understood taps, she had knowledge of cogs, she could enter into intricate wards of keys, and was fond of letter-padlocks; but now she had something which combined them all; and she could not make head or tail of it.

"I thought that I knew every metal that grows," she said, as Alice opened her languid hand for such a trifle; "I always clean our forks and spoons, and my mother's three silver teapots. But I never beheld any metal of such a colour as this has got, before. Can you tell me what this metal is?"

"I ought to know something, but I know nothing," Alice answered, wearily; "my father is acknowledged to be full of learning. Every minute I expect him."

"No doubt he will tell us, when he comes. But I am so impatient. And it looks like the key of some wonderful lock, that nothing else would open. May I ask what it is? Come, at least say that."

"It will give me the greatest delight to know," said Alice, with a yawn, "what the thing is; because it will please you, darling. And it certainly does look curious."

Upon this question Mrs. Bottler, like a good wife, referred them to her more learned husband, who came in now from his morning drive, scraping off the frozen snow, and accompanied, of course, by Polly.

"Polly's doll, that's what we call it," he said; "the little maid took such a liking to it, that Bonny was forced to give it her. Where the boy got it, the Lord only knows. The Lord hath given him the gift of finding a'most everything. He hath it both in his eyes and hands. I believe that boy'd die Lord Mayor of London if he'd only come out of his hole in the hill."

"But cannot we see him, Mr. Bottler?

asked Mabel; "when he is finding these things, does he lose himself?"

"Not he, Miss!" replied the man of bacon. "He knows where he is, go where he will. You can hear him a-whistling down the lane now. He knoweth when I've a been easing of the pigs, sharper than my own steel do. Chittlings, or skirt, or milt, or trimmings—oh, he's the boy for a rare pig's fry—it don't matter what the weather is. I'd as lief dine with him as at home a'most."

"Oh, let me go and see him at the door," cried Mabel; "I am so fond of clever boys." So out she ran without waiting for leave, and presently ran back again. "Oh, what a nice boy!" she exclaimed to Alice; "so very polite, and he has got such eyes! But I'm sadly afraid he'll be impudent when he grows much older."

"Aha, Miss, aha, Miss! you are right enough there," observed Mr. Bottler with a crafty grin. "He ain't over bashful already perhaps."

"And where do you think he found this most extraordinary instrument? At Shoreham, drawn up by the nets from the sea! And they said that it must have been dropped from a

ship, many and many a year ago, when Shoreham was a place for foreign traffic. And he is almost sure that it must be a key of some very strange old-fashioned lock."

"Then you may depend upon it, that it is a key, and nothing else," said Bottler, with his fine soft smile. "That boy Bonny hath been about so much among odds, and ends, and rakings, that he knoweth a bit about everything."

"An old-fashioned key from the sea at Shoreham? Let me think of something," said Alice Lorraine, leaning back on her pillow, with her head still full of the Woeburn. "I seem to remember something, and then I am not at all sure what it is. Oh! when is my father coming?"

"Your father hath sent orders, Miss Alice," said Bottler, coming back with a good bold lie, "that you must go up to the house, if you please. He hath so much to see to with them Chapman lot, that he must not leave home nohow. The coach is a-coming for you now just."

"Very well," answered Alice, "I will do as I am told. I mean to do always whatever I am told for all the rest of my life, I am sure. But will you lend me Polly's doll?"

"Lord bless you, Miss, I daren't do it for my life. Polly would have the house down. She'm the strangest child as you ever did see, until you knows how to manage her. Her requireth to be taken the right side up. Now, if I say 'Poll' to her, her won't do nothing; but if I say 'Polly dear,'—why, there she is!"

Alice was too weak and worn to follow this great question up. But Mabel was as wide awake as ever, although she had been up all night. "Now, Mr. Bottler, just do this: Go and say, 'Polly, dear, will you lend your doll to the pretty lady, till it comes back covered with sugar-plums?'" Mr. Bottler promised that he would do this; and by the time Alice was ready to go, square Polly, with a very broad gait, came up and placed her doll, without a word, in the hands of Alice, and then ran away, and could never stop sobbing, until her father put the horse in on purpose, and got her between his legs in the cart. "'Where are you going?" cried Mrs. Bottler. "We will drive to the end of the world," he answered; "I'm blowed if I think there'll be any gate to pay between this and that, by the look of things. Polly, hold on by daddy's knees."

CHAPTER XXV.

FROM HADES' GATES.

In the old house and good household, warmth of opinion and heat of expression abounded now about everything. Pages might be taken up with saying what even one man thought, and tens of pages would not contain the half of what one woman said. Enough, that when poor Alice was brought back through the snow-drifts quietly, every movable person in the house was at the door. Everybody loved her and everybody admired her; but now, with a pendulous conscience. Also, with much fear about themselves; as the household of Admetus gazed at the pale return of Alcestis.

Alice, being still so weak, and quite unfit for anything, was frightened at their faces, and drew back and sank with faintness.

"Sillies," cried Mabel, jumping out, with Polly's doll inside her muff; "naturals, or whatever you are, just come and do your duty."

They still hung away, and not one of them would help poor Alice across her own father's threshold, until a great scatter of snow flew about, and a black horse was reined up hotly.

"You zanies!" cried the rector, "you cowardly fools! You never come to church, or you would know what to do. You skulking hounds, are you afraid of your own master's daughter? I have got my big whip. By the Lord, you shall have it. Out of my parish I'll set to and kick every dastardly son of a cook of you."

"Where is my father?" said Alice faintly; "I hoped that he would have come for me."

At the sound of her voice they began to perceive that she was not the ghost of the Woeburn; and the rector's strong championship cast at once the broad and sevenfold shield of the church over the maiden's skeary deed. "Oh, Uncle Struan," she whispered, hanging upon his arm, as he led her in; "have I committed some great crime? Will my father be ashamed of me?"

"He should rather be ashamed of himself, I think," he answered, for the present declining the subject, which he meant to have out with her some day; "but, my dear, he is not quite

well; that is why he does not come to see you. And, indeed, he does not know—I mean he is not at all certain how you are. Trotman, open that door, sir, this moment."

The parson rather carried than led his niece into a sitting-room, and set her by a bright fire, and left Mabel Lovejoy to attend to her; while he himself hurried away to hear the last account of Sir Roland, and to consult the doctor as to the admittance of poor Alice. But in the passage he met Colonel Clumps, heavily stumping to and fro, with even more than wonted energy.

"Upon my life and soul, Master Parson, I must get out of this house," he cried; "slashing work, sir, horrible slashing! I had better be under old Beaky again. I came here to quiet my system, sir; and zounds, sir, they make every hair stand up."

"Why, Colonel, what is the matter now? Surely, a man of war, like you——"

"Yes, sir, a man of war I am; but not a man of suicide, and paralysis, and precipices, and concussions of the brain, sir—battle, and murder, and sudden death—why, my own brain is in a concussion, sir!"

"So it appears," said the rector softly.

"But surely, Colonel, you can tell us what the news is."

"The news is just this, sir," cried the Colonel, stamping, "the two Chapmans were upset in their coach last night down a precipice, and both killed as dead as stones, sir. They sent for the doctor; that's proof of it; our doctor has had to be off for his life. No man ever sends for the doctor, until he is dead."

"There is some truth in that," replied Mr. Hales; "but I won't believe it quite yet, at any rate. No doubt they have been upset. I said so as soon as I heard they were gone; particularly with their postilions drunk. And I dare say they are a good deal knocked about. But snow is a fine thing to ease a fall. Whatever has happened, they brought on themselves, by their panic and selfish cowardice."

"Ay, they ran like rats from a sinking ship, when they saw poor Sir Roland's condition. Alice had frightened them pretty well; but the other affair quite settled them. Sad as it was, I could scarcely help laughing."

"A sad disappointment for your nice girls, Colonel. Instead of a gay wedding, a house of death."

"And for your pretty daughters, Rector, too.

However, we must not think of that. You have taken in the two Lovejoys, I hear."

"Gregory and Charlie? Yes, poor fellows. They were thoroughly scared last night, and of course Bottler had no room for them. That Charlie is a grand fellow, and fit to follow in the wake of Nelson. He was frozen all over as stiff as a rick just thatched, and what did he say to me? He said, 'I shall get into the snow and sleep. I won't wet mother Bottler's floor.'"

"Well done! well said! There is nothing in the world to equal English pluck, sir, when you come across the true breed of it. Ah, if those d——d fellows had left me my leg, I would have whistled about my arm, sir. But the worst of the whole is this, supposing that I am grossly insulted, sir, how can I do what a Briton is bound to do—how can I kick—you know what I mean, sir?"

"Come, Colonel, if you can manage to spin round like that, you need not despair of compassing the national salute. But here we are at Sir Roland's door. Are we allowed to go in? or what are the orders of the doctor?"

"Oh yes; he is quite unconscious. You might fire off a cannon close to his ear, without

his starting a hair's breadth. He will be so for three days, the doctor thinks; and then he will awake, and live or die according as the will of the Lord is."

"Most of us do that," answered the parson; "but what shall I say to his daughter?"

"Leave her to me. I will take her a message, sir. I have been hoaxed so in the army, that now I can hoax any one."

"I believe you are right. She will listen to you a great deal more than she would to me. Moreover, I want to be off, as soon as I have seen poor Sir Roland. I shall ride on, and ask how the Chapmans are. I don't believe they are dead; they are far too tough. What a blessing it is to have you here, Colonel, with the house in such a state! How is that confounded old woman, who lies at the bottom of all this mischief?"

"Lady Valeria Lorraine," said the Colonel rather stiffly, "is as well as can be expected, sir. She has been to see her son Sir Roland, and her grandson Hilary. My opinion is that this brave girl inherits her spirit from her grandmother. Whatever happens, I am sure of one thing, she ought to be the mother of heroes, sir; not the wife of Steenie Chapman."

"Ah's me," cried the rector; "it will take a brave man to marry her, after what she has done."

"Stuff and nonsense," answered the Colonel; "a good man will value her all the more, and scorn the opinion of the county, sir."

The rector, in his own stout heart, was much of the same persuasion; but it would not do for him to say so yet. So, after a glance at Sir Roland's wan and death-like features, he rode forth, with a sigh, to look after the Chapmans.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SOMETHING LIKE A LEGACY.

A GRAND physician being called from London, pronounced that Sir Roland's case was one of asthenic apoplexy, rather than of pure paralysis. He gave the proper directions, praised the local practitioners, hoped for the best, took his fifty guineas with promptitude, and departed. If there were any weight on the mind, it must be cast aside at once, as soon as the mind should have sense of it. For this a little effort might be allowed, "such as the making of a will, or so forth, or good-bye to children; for on the first return of sense, some activity was good for it. "But after that, repose, dear sir, insist on repose, and good nourishing food. No phlebotomy—no, that is quite a mistake; an anachronism, a barbarism, in such a case as this is. It is anæmia, with our poor friend, and vascular inaction. No arterial

plethorism; quite the opposite, in fact. You have perfectly diagnosed the case. How it will end I cannot say, any more than you can."

One more there was, one miserable heart, perpetually vexed and torn, that could not tell how things would end, if even they ended anyhow. Alice Lorraine could not be kept from going to her father's bed, and she was not strong enough yet to bear the sight of the wreck before her.

"It is my doing—my doing," she cried; "oh what a wicked thing I must have done, to be punished so bitterly as this!"

"If you please, Miss, to go away with your excitement," said the old nurse, who was watching him. "You promised to behave yourself; and this is how you does it! Us never can tell what they hears, or what they don't; when they lies with their ears pricked up so."

"Nurse, I will go away," said Alice; "I always do more harm than good."

The only comfort she now could get flowed from the warm bright heart of Mabel. Everybody else gave signs of being a little, or much, afraid of her. And what is more dreadful for any kind heart, than for other hearts to dread it? She knew that she had done a desperate thing;

and she felt that everybody had good reason for shrinking away from her large deep eyes. She tried to keep up her courage, in spite of all that was whispered about her; and truly speaking, her whole heart vested in her father and her brother.

Mabel watched the whole of this, and did her best to help it. But sweet and good girl as she was, and in her way very noble, she belonged to a stratum of womanhood distinct from that of Alice. She would never have jumped into the river. She would simply have defied them to take her to church. She would have cried, "Here I am, and I won't marry any man, unless I love him. I don't love this man; and I won't have him. Now do your worst, every one of you." A sensible way of regarding the thing, except for the need of the money.

On the third day, Sir Roland moved his eyes, and feebly raised one elbow. Alice sat there at his side, as now she was almost always sitting. "Oh father," she cried, "if you would only give me one little sign that you know me. Just to move your darling hand, or just to give me one little glance. Or if I have no right to that——"

"Go away, Miss; leave the room, if you please. My orders was very particular to have nobody near him, when he first begins to take notice to anything."

Alice, with a deep sigh, obeyed the orders of the cross old dame; and when the doctor came she received her reward in his approval. It was pitiful to see how humble this poor girl was now become. The accident to the Chapmans, her father's "stroke," poor Hilary's ruin, the lowering of the family for years, had all been attributed to her "wicked sin," by Lady Valeria, whose wrath was boundless at the overthrow of all her plans.

"What good have you done? What good have you done by such a heinous outrage? You have disgraced yourself for ever. Who will ever look at you now?"

"Everybody, I am afraid, Madam," Alice answered, with a blush.

"You know what I mean, as well as I do. Even if you were drowned, I believe you would catch at the words of your betters."

"Drowning people catch at straws," she answered, with a shudder of memory.

"And you could not even drown yourself You were too clumsy to do even that."

"Well, Madam," said Alice, with a smile almost resembling that of better times; "surely even you will admit that I did my best towards it."

"Ah, you flighty child, leave my room, and go and finish killing your father."

Now when the doctor came and saw the slight revival of his patient, he hurried in search of Miss Lorraine, towards whom he had taken a liking. After he had given his opinion of the case, and comforted her until she cried, he said—"Now you must come and see him. And if you can think of anything likely to amuse him, or set his mind in motion—any interesting remembrance, or suggestion of mild surprise, it will be the very best thing possible."

"But surely, to see me again will sufficiently astonish him."

"It is not likely. In most of these cases perfect oblivion is the rule as to the occurrence that stimulated the predisposition to these attacks. Sir Roland will not have the smallest idea that—that anything has happened to you."

And so it proved. When Alice came to her father's side, he looked at her exactly as he used to do, except that his glance was weak and wavering, and full of desire to comfort her.

The doctor had told her to look cheerful, and even gay—and she did her best. Sir Roland had lost all power of speech; but his hearing was as good as ever; and being ordered to take turtle-soup, he was propped up on a bank of pillows, and doing his best to execute medical directions.

"Oh, my darling, darling," cried Alice, after a little while, being left to feed her father delicately: "I have got such a surprise for you! You will say you were never so astonished in all the course of your life before."

She knew how her father would have answered if he had been at all himself. He would have lifted his eyebrows, and aroused her dutiful combativeness, with some of that little personal play which passes between near relatives, who love and understand each other. As it was, he could only nod, to show his anxiety for some surprise. And then Alice did a thing which, under any other circumstances, would have been most inconsistent in her. In the drawer of his looking-glass she found his best-beloved snuff-box, and she put one little pinch between his limp forefinger and white thumb, and raised them towards the proper part, and trusted to nature to do the

rest. A pleasant light shone forth his eyes; and she felt that she had earned a kiss. Betwixt a smile and a tear, she took it; and then, for fear of a chill, she tucked him up, and sat quietly by him. She had learned, as we learn in our syntax, what,—"vacuis committere venis."

When he had slept for two or three hours, with Alice hushing the sound of her breath, he was seized with sudden activity. His body had been greatly strengthened by the most nourishing of all food; and now his mind began to aim at like increase of movement.

"What do you think I have got to show you?" said Alice, perceiving this condition. "Nothing less, I do believe, than the key of the fine old Astrologer's case! Of course, I can only guess, because you have got it locked away, papa. But from the metal looking just the same, and the shape of it, and the seven corners, and its being found at Shoreham, in the sea, where Memel was said to have lost it, I do think it must be that very same key. And I found it, papa—well, I found it under rather peculiar circumstances... Now may I go and try? There can be no harm, if it turns out to be pure fancy."

Her father nodded, and pointed to a drawer

where he kept his important keys, as his daughter of course was well aware. And in five minutes, Alice came back again, with the strange old case in one hand, and Polly's queer doll in the other. Mabel lingered in the passage, not being sure that she ought to come in, though Alice tried to fetch her. Then Alice set the case, or cushion, upon her father's bedside table, and with a firm hand pushed the key down, and endeavoured to turn it. Not a tittle would anything yield or budge; although it was clear to the dullest eye that lock and key belonged together.

"It is the key, papa," cried Alice; "it fits to a hair; but it won't turn. This queer old thing goes round and round, instead of staying quiet, and waiting to be unlocked justly. I suppose my hands are too weak. Oh there! Provoking thing, it goes round again. I know how I could manage it, if I may, my darling father. In the Astrologer's room, I saw a tremendous vice, fit to take anything. I have inherited some of his turn for tools and mechanism; though of course in a most degenerate degree. Now may I go up? I shall have no fear whatever, if Mabel comes with me."

Winning mute assent, she ran for the key of

that room, and took Mabel with her; and soon they had that obstinate case set fast in a vice, whose screw had not been turned for more than two centuries. The bottom of the cone was hard and solid, and bedded itself in the old oak slabs.

"Now turn, Mabel, turn; the key is warped, or we might apply more force," said Alice. They did not know that it had been crooked by the jaws of Jack the donkey. Even so, it would not yield, until they passed an ancient chisel through its loop, and worked away. Then, with a thin and sulky screech, the cogs began to move, and the upper half of the case to slide aside.

"Oh, I am so frightened, Alice," cried Mabel, drawing back her hands. "And the room is so cold! It seems so unholy! It feels like witchcraft! And all his old tools looking at us!"

"Witch, or wizard, or necromancer, I am not going to leave off now," answered Alice the resolute. "You may run away, if you like. But I mean to get to the bottom of this, if I—if I can, at least."

She was going to say, "if I die for it." But she had been so close to Death quite lately, that she feared to take his name in vain.

"How slowly it moves! How it does resist!" cried Mabel, returning to the charge. "I thought I was pretty strong—well, it ought to be worth something for all this work."

"It is fire-proof! It is lined with asbestos!" Alice answered eagerly. "Oh, there must be an enormous lot of gold."

"There can't be," said Mabel; "why, a thousand guineas is more than you or I could carry. And you carried this easily in one hand."

"Don't talk so!" cried Alice; "but work away. I am desperately anxious."

"As for me, I am positively dying of curiosity. Lend me your pocket-handkerchief, dear. I am cutting my hands to pieces."

"Here it comes, I do believe. Well, what an extraordinary thing!"

The dome of the cone had yielded sulkily to the vigour and perseverance of two good young ladies. It had slidden horizontally, the key of course sliding with it, upon a strong rack of metal, which had been purposely made to go stiffly; and now that the cover had passed the cogs, it was lifted off quite easily. All this was the handiwork of the man, the simple-minded Eastern sage, who loved the shepherds

and the sheep; and whose fine spirit would have now rejoiced to see the result of good workmanship.

The two fair girls poured hair together, with forehead close to forehead, when the round substantial case lay coverless before them. A disc of yellow parchment was spread flat on the top of everything, with its edges crenelled into the asbestos lining. Hours, and perhaps days of care, had been spent by clever brain and hands, to keep the air and dust out.

"Who shall lift it?" asked Mabel, panting. "I am almost afraid to move."

"I will lift it, of course," said Alice; "I am his descendant; and he foresaw that I should do it."

She took from the lathe a little narrow tool for turning ivory (which had touched no hand since the Prince's), and she delicately loosened up the parchment, and examined it. It was covered with the finest manuscript, in concentric rings, beginning with half an inch of diameter; but she could not interpret a word of that. Below it shone a thick flossy layer of the finest mountain wool; and under that the soft spun amber of the richest native silk.

"Now, Alice, do you mean to stop all

night!" cried Mabel; "see how the light is fading!"

The light was fading, and spreading also, in a way that reminded Alice (although the season and the weather were so entirely different) of her visit to that room, two and a half long years ago, alone among the shadows. The white light, with the snow-gleam in it, favoured any inborn light in everything else that was beautiful.

Alice, with the gentlest touch of the fairy-gifts of her fingers, raised the last gossamer of the silk, and drew back, and sighed with wonder. Mabel (always prompt to take the barb and shaft of everything) leaned over, and looked in, and at once enlarged her eyes and mouth in purest stupefaction.

Before and between these two most lovely specimens of the human race, lay the most beautiful and more lasting proofs of what nature used to do, before the production of women. Alice and Mabel, with the light in their eyes, and the flush in their fair cheeks quivering, felt that their beauty was below contempt—except in the opinion of stupid men—if compared with what they were looking at.

Of all the colours cast by nature on the

world, as lavishly as Shakespeare threw his jewels forth, of all the tints of sun and heaven in flower, sea, and rainbow, there was not one that did not glance, or gleam, or lie in ambush, and then suddenly flash forth, and blush, and then fall back again. None of them waited to be looked at; all were in perpetual play; they had been immured for centuries; and when the glad light broke upon them, forth they danced like meteors. And then, as if all quick with life, they began to weave their crossing rays, and cast their tints through one another, like the hurtling of the Aurora. And to back their fitful brilliance, in among them lay and spread a soft, delicious, milky way of bashful white serenity.

"It is terrible witchcraft!" cried dazzled Mabel.

"No," said Alice; "it is the noblest casket ever seen, of precious opals, and of pearls. You shall carry them to my father."

"Indeed, I will not," said the generous Mabel; "you have earned, and you shall offer them."

CHAPTER XXVII.

SCIENTIFIC SOLUTION.

BEAUTY having due perception and affection for itself, it is natural that young ladies should be much attached to jewels. It does not, however, follow that they know anything about them, any more than they always do about other objects of their attachment. Nevertheless, they always want to know the money-value.

"I should say they were worth a thousand pounds, if they are worth a penny," said Mabel, sagely shaking her head, and looking wonderfully learned.

"A thousand!" cried Alice. "Ten thousand, you mean. Now put it all back as we found it."

"Oh, one more glance, one more good look, before other people see them! Oh, let the light fall sideways."

Mabel, in her admiration, danced all round

the astrologer's room, whisking the dust from the wheel of his lathe, and scattering quaint rare tools about; while Alice, calmly smiling at her, repacked the case, silk, wool, and parchment, and giving her friend the cover to carry, led the way towards her father's room.

Sir Roland Lorraine was so amazed, that for the moment the mind resumed command of the body; the needful effort was made; and he "spake with his tongue" once more, though feebly and inarticulately.

"Father, darling, that is worth more to me," cried Alice, throwing her arms around him, "than all the jewels that ever were made from the first year of the world to this. Oh, I could never, never live, without hearing your dear voice."

It was long, however, before Sir Roland recovered mind and spirit, so as to attempt a rendering of the provident sage's document. The writing was so small, that a powerful lens was wanted for it; the language, moreover, was Latin, and the contractions crabbed to the last degree. And crammed as it was with terms of art, an interpreter might fairly doubt whether his harder task would be, to make out the words, or their meaning. But omitting some quite

unintelligible parts, it seemed to be somewhat as follows :—

"Oh, descendant of mine in far-off ages, neither be thou carried away by desire of riches, neither suppose thine ancestor to have been so carried. I bid thee rather to hold thy money in the place of nothing, and to be taught that it is a work of royal amplitude and most worthy of the noblest princes, to conquer the obstinacy of nature by human skill and fortitude. Labouring much I have accomplished little ; seeking many things I have found some ; it is not just that I should be forgotten, or mingled with those of my time and rank, who live by violence, and do nothing for the benefit of humanity.

"Among many other things which I have by patience and learning conquested, the one the most likely of all to lead to wealth is of a simple kind. To wit, as Glaucus of Chios (following up the art of Celmis and Damnameneus) discovered the κόλλησις of iron, so have I discovered that of jewels—the opal, and perhaps the ruby. As regards the opal, I am certain ; as regards the ruby, I have still some difficulties to conquer. All who know the opal can, with very clear vision, perceive

that its lustre and versatile radiance flow from innumerable lamins, united by fusion in the endless flux of years. Having discovered how to solve the opal with a caustic liquor"—here followed chemical marks, which none but a learned chemist could understand—"and how to recompose it, I have spent twelve months in Hungary, collecting a full medimuus of small opals of the purest quality. After many trials and a great waste of material, I have accomplished things undreamed by Baccius, Evax, or Leonardus; I have produced the priceless opal, cast to mould, and of purest water, from the size of an avellan-nut to that of a small castane. Larger I would not make them, knowing the incredulity of mankind, who take for false all things more than twice the size of their own experience.

"Alas! it is allowed to no man, great works having been carried through, to see what will become of them. These gems of inestimable value, polished by their own liquescence, and coherent as the rainbow, demand, so far as I yet can judge, at least a hundred years of darkness and of cavernous seclusion, such as nature and the gods require for all perfect work. And when the air is first let in, it must be very

slowly done, otherwise all might fall abroad, as though I had never touched them. For this, with the vigilance of a great philosopher, I have provided.

"Now farewell, whether descended from me, or whether (if the fates will) alien. A philosopher who has penetrated, and under the yoke led nature, is the last of all men to speak proudly, or record his own great deeds. That he leaves for inferior and less tranquil minds, as are those of the poets. Only do not thou sell these gems for little, if thou sell them. The smallest of them is larger and finer than that of the Senator Nonius, or that which is called 'Troy burning,' from the propugnacled flash of its movement. Be not misled by jewellers. Rogues they are, and imitators, and perpetually striving to make gain disgracefully. Hearken thou not to one word of these; but keep these jewels, if thou canst. If narrow matters counsel sale, then go to the king of thy country, or great nobles, who will not wrong thee. And be sure that thou keep them well advised, that neither in skill of hand nor in learning should they attempt to vie with Agasicles the Carian."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HER HEART IS HIS.

LONG ere the writing of the diffident sage had been thus interpreted, the casket, or rather its contents (being entrusted to the wary hands of the Counsellor, on his return to London) had passed the severest test and been pronounced of enormous value. The great philosopher had not deigned to say a word about the pearls, whether produced or amalgamated by his skill, or whether they were heirlooms in his ancient family. The jewellers said that they were Cingalese, and of the rarest quality; and for these alone one large house (holding a commission from a coalowner), offered fifteen, and then twenty, and finally twenty-five thousand pounds. But Sir Roland had resolved not to part with these, but divide them between his daughter and future daughter-in-law, if he could raise the required sum without them. In

this no difficulty was found. Though opals were not in fashion just then (and indeed they are even now undervalued, through a stupid superstition), six of the smaller gems were sold for £65,000, and now their owners would not accept double that price for them.

Lady Valeria right quickly discarded her terror of that casket, and very quietly appropriated the magnificent central gem. It was the cover, with its spiral coils of metal, which had frightened her ladyship. The strongest-minded ladies are, as a general rule, the most obstinate in their dread of what has injured them. The Earl of Thanet, this lady's father, had been a great lover of the honey-bee, and among his other experiments, he had a small metal hive, which his daughter upset, with results which need not trouble us so much as they troubled the lady. And although so much smaller, the astrologer's case strangely resembled that deadly hive.

When Hilary's sin had been purged, and himself (at certainly a somewhat heavy figure) allowed to draw his sword again; he soon regained all his former strength, and health, and perhaps a little more than his former share of wisdom. But he did not march into Paris, as

Colonel Clumps had once predicted; or at least not in that memorable year 1814. But in July of the following year, he certainly put in an appearance there, under the immortal Wellington, who had been truly pleased to have him under his command, but never on his Staff, again. And Hilary Lorraine, at Waterloo, had shown most clearly (through the thick of the smoke) that if the Duke had erred about his discretion, he had made no mistake about his valour.

And it was, of course, tenfold more valorous of him to carry on as he did there, when he called to mind that he had at home a lovely wife, of the name of Mabel, and a baby of the name of Roger. Because he had taken advantage of the piping time of peace,—when all the "crowned heads" were in England,—to put on his own head that "crown of glory" (richer than mural or civic) whereof the wise man speaks the more warmly, because he had so many of them. In June, 1814, Hilary and Mabel were made one, under junction of the good rector; and nature, objecting to this depopulating fusion of her integrals, had sternly recouped her arithmetic, by appeal to the multiplication table.

At Waterloo, Hilary worked his right arm much harder than he worked it through the rest of his life; because there he lost it. When the French Cuirassiers made their grand third charge upon the British artillery, to change the fortune, or meet their fate, Lorraine with his troop of the Dasher-Hussars, now commanded by Colonel Aylmer, was in front of the rest of the regiment. The spirit of these men was up; they had been a long while held back, that day, and they could not see any reason why they should not have their turn at it. Man and horse were of one accord, needing no spur, neither heeding bridle. As straight as hounds in full view, they flew; and Hilary flew in front of them. In the crush and crash, he got rolled over, dismounted, and left slashing wildly in a storm of horses. An enormous cuirassier made at him, with a sword of monstrous length. Their eyes met, and they knew each other—the robber and the robbed; the crafty plotter and the simple one; the victor and the victim.

Alcides cried in Spanish—"Thou art at thy latest gasp; I have no orders now from my precious wife—receive this, and no more of thee!" With rowels deep in the flank of his horse, he made horrible swoop at Hilary, spent

of strength and able only to present a feeble guard. Hilary's blade spun round and round, and his right arm flew off at the elbow; and the crash was descending upon his poor head, when a stern reply met Alcides. Through the joints of his harness Joyce Aylmer's sword went in, and drank his life-blood. His horse dashed on; and he lay on the plain, like the felled trunk of a poison-tree,—that plain where lay so many nobler, and so few meaner than himself. Having run through the whole of the stolen money, he had donned the French cuirass, and left his wife and infant child to starve.

When the times of slaughter passed, and nature began to be aware again that she has other manure than bloodshed; when even the cows could low without fear of telling where their calves were, and mares could lick their foals unwept on; and hills and valleys began again to listen to the voice of quiet waters (drowned no more in the din of the drum); and everything in our dear country was most wonderfully dear,—something happened at this period not to be passed over. Parenthetically it may be said—and deserves no more than parenthesis—that neither of the

Chapmans had been killed (as mendacious fame reported), only knocked on the head, and legs, and stomach, and other convenient places. Steenie wedded their housemaid Sally; and it was the best thing he could have done, to clean up the steps of the family.

But now there is just time to say that it must have been broad August, when the fields were growing white for harvest, after the swath of Waterloo, ere Colonel Aylmer durst bring forth what he nursed in his heart for Alice. His words were short and simple, though he did not mean to make them so. But he found her in old Chancton Ring, where first he had beholden her; and so much came across him, that he never took his hat off, but just whispered underneath it. The whisper went under a prettier hat, where it long had been expected; and if a feather waved at all, it only was a white one.

"Are you not afraid of me?" asked Alice Lorraine, with a tremulous glance, enough to terrify any one.

"That I am, to the last degree. I never shall get over it."

"That augurs well," she replied with a smile—such a smile as no one else could give;

"but I mean more than that; I mean your fear of what the world will say of me."

"Of that I am infinitely more afraid. It will vex me so, to hear for ever—'What has he done to deserve such a wife?'"

"Then what he has done is simply this," cried Alice, looking nobly; "he has saved her life, and her brother's; he has taught her now to fear herself; and her heart is his, if he cares for it."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAST WORD COMES FROM BONNY.

It takes but little time to tell what happened to the rest of them. Sir Roland Lorraine had the pleasure of seeing two tribes of grandchildren round him, who routed him out of his book-room, and scattered his unwholesome tendencies wholesale. If he shocked society in his middle age, society had revenge in the end, and pursued him, like the Eumenides. The difference was this, however, that here were truly well-meaning ones, not called so by timorous truckling. And another point of distinction might be found in the style of their legs and bodies. Also, they had no "stony glare," but the brightest of all young eyes, that shine like a flower filled with morning dew.

These little men and women played at hide-and-seek, and made rich echo in the Woeburn channel. Forsooth, that fearful stream (like

other fateful rivers), beaten by Vulcanian fires of Bottler—or, as some people said (who knew not Bottler), by the power of the long dry frost—retired into the bowels of the earth, and never means to come forth again. But before leaving off, it did one good thing—it drowned old Nanny Stilgoe. "Prophet of ill, never yet to me spakest thou thing lucksome"—this was the sentiment of that river when disappointed of Alice. Old Nanny ran out of her door the next day, with a stick, at a boy who cast snowballs, and she slipped on some ice, and in she went; and some people tried to rake her out, but she was too perverse for them. Her prophecies of evil fell, like lead on her head, and sank her; and the parish was fiercely divided whether she ought to have Christian burial. But Rector Hales let them talk as they liked, and refused to hear reason about it. He had made up his own mind what to do (which of all things is the foremost); so he buried old Nanny, and paid for it all, and set up her tombstone, whereon the sculptor, with visions of his own date prolonged, set down her figure at 110.

The passing of time is one of those things that most astonish every one. For instance,

no one would ever believe, except with a hand upon either temple, that Applewood farm is now carried on, and all the growing business done, by a sturdy and highly enlightened young fellow, whose name is Struan Lovejoy. He owes his origin to a heavy cold, caught by his father (the present highly respected Admiral Sir Charles Lovejoy), through the freezing of his naval trousers, and the coddling which of course ensued. Charlie's heart lay open through all the stages of catarrh, and he felt, even in the worst fits of sneezing, whose initials were done in hair on three handkerchiefs under his pillow. In short, no sooner did his nose begin to resume its duty in the system, and his eyes to cease from running, then he took Cecil Hales by the hand, and said that he had something to say to her. And he said it well; as sailors do. And she could not deny that it might mean something, if ever they could maintain themselves.

This is what all young people say; some with a little, and some with less, discretion upon the subject. The helm of all the question hangs upon the man's own sternpost. There is no time to talk of that. Charlie married Cecil; and they had a son called "Struan."

Struan Lovejoy took the turn for gardening and for growing, which had failed the Lovejoy race in the middle generation. Gout descends, and so does growing, with a skip of one step of mankind; and you cannot make the wrong generation lay heel on spade, or toe in slipper.

But most of us can make some men feel—however small our circle is—that there is room for them inside it. That we scorn hypocritical love of mean humanity; but love the noble specimens—when we get them. That we know how short our time is, and attempt to do a little forward for the slowly rolling age. In a word that, taking things altogether, they are pretty nearly as good as could have been hoped for, even sixty years ago.

But it is quite a few years back, to wit in 1861, when the great leading case upon rights of way—"Lovejoy *v.* Shatterlocks"—was tried for the ninth and final time. Chief Justice Sir Gregory Lovejoy, through feelings of delicacy, left the Bench, and would not even allow his wife—our Phyllis Catherow—to be called. But Major-general Sir Hilary Lorraine marched into the witness-box; and so vividly did he call to mind what had passed (and what had been stopped) at the white gate, and where the key

was kept, half a century ago, that the Defendant had no leg to stand upon. Mabel (who heard all his evidence, with an Alice Mabel's hand in hers) vowed that he made a confusion of keys, and was thinking of the gate where she came to meet him. And when he had time for more reflection, he could not contradict her.

Now what says Bonny? He sits on his hill. He sees his life before him. Though he does not know that for finding the key, he is to have £1000, invested already, and to accumulate, until he entirely settles down. In fulness of time he will cast away the unsaleable portion of his rags, and wed square Polly Bottler. Their hearts are as one; they only wait for parental assent, and the band or bann—whichever may be the proper word—shouted thrice by the rector, defiant of the world to forbid those two. They are not ready yet to be joined together; but they are polishing their fire-irons.

Meanwhile Bonny may be seen to sit in one of those wonderful nicks of the hill, which seem to be scolloped by nature and padded, to tempt her restless mankind to rest. For here the curve of the slope is so snug, that only pleasant airs find entry, with the flowery tales they bring, and the grass is of the greenest, and the peep

into the lowland distance of the most refreshing blue. Lulled on a bank here Bonny sits, not quite so fair as the fairy-queen (who perhaps is watching him unseen), but picturesque enough for the age, and provided with a donkey worthy of Titania's purest love. Jack is gazing with deep interest at an image of himself, cleverly shaped by his master on the green with snowy outline of chalky flints. Here are set forth his long tail, white nose, and ears as long and rich as the emblem of fair Ceres. He sniffs at his nose, and he treads on his toes, and not being able to explain away all things, he falls to and grazes from his own stomach.

But what is Bonny doing here, instead of attending to his rags and bones? Well, he ought to be, but he certainly is not, attending to the rector's sheep. To wit Mr. Hales, growing stiff in the saddle, betakes himself freely to saddles of mutton; and has paid, and is paying, his three daughters' portions, after the manner of the patriarchs. But leaving the flock to their own devices (for which, an he were satirical, he might quote his master as precedent) Bonny opens his capacious mouth, and the fresh air of the Downs rings richly, with a simple

SOUTHDOWN SONG.

1

"When the sheep are on the hill,
In the early summer day,
They may wander at their will,
While I go myself astray.
Chorus (*sustained by sheep and Jack*).
We may wander at our will,
While you go to sleep, or play!

2

"If the May wind hath an edge
Rather winterly and cold,
I shall sit beneath a hedge,
While they wander o'er the wold.
Chorus (*by the same performers*).
There you sit beneath the hedge,
Singing like a minstrel bold!

3

"Should ill-natured people say
That I loiter, or do ill,
Pick a hole in me they may—
When they see me through the hill.
Chorus.
If they catch you at your play,
Whip you merrily they will.

4

"Playful creatures grow not old;
Play is healthy nature's pledge.
'Tis the dull heart gives the hold
For the point of trouble's wedge.
Chorus.
These reflections are as old
As the saws of rush and sedge.

5

"Frisky lambkins in the grass,
Mint and pepper, if they spy,
Do they weep, and cry 'alas!'?
Nay, but whisk their tails on high.
Chorus.
Weep indeed, and cry alas!
Sooner you, than we or I.

6

"Look, how soon the shadows pass,
How the sun hath chased the gloom!
If our life is only grass—
Grass is where the flowers bloom.
Chorus.
If we mainly live on grass,
Many a flower we consume."

And so may we leave them singing.

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